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A Restatement of the History of Islam & Muslims



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Chapter 1

Introduction

This is a new story of Islam. It is the story of the movement which was launched by Muhammad, the Messenger of God, in A.D. 610 in Makkah, and was consummated with the support of his cousin, collaborator and vicegerent, Ali ibn Abi Talib, in A.D. 632 in Medina. It covers a period of ninety years from A.D. 570 when he was born in Makkah, to A.D. 661 when his successor, Ali ibn Abi Talib, was assassinated in Kufa.

Countless histories of Islam have been written in the past and will be written in the future. The spectacular advance of Islam in the missionary field in our own times; the renaissance of the Muslim nations after many centuries of slumber; the obtrusion of oil as a new factor in world politics in this century; but above all and most recently, the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, all are acting, both in the east and in the west, as catalysts of a new interest in Islam. The Revolution in Iran, has, in fact, triggered a world-wide explosion of interest in Islam, and many new books are being written on the subject – both by Muslims and non-Muslims.

In these days when the leaders of the Christian world are quietly working to realize the old dream of Christian ecumenism, many Muslims are also looking back nostalgically toward that ideal state when Islam was monolithic. Islam, however, was monolithic only during the lifetime of its Prophet, Muhammad, the blessed one. As soon as he died, the first crack appeared in the "monolith" of Islam. His followers – the Muslims – were polarized into two groups. In this polarization, most of his companions were on the one side and the members of his family on the other. While the members of his family were occupied with his obsequies, some of his companions were occupied in "electing" a new leader to succeed him. During the interval between his death and his burial,

the latter gathered in the outhouse of Saqifa in Medina, and elected one out of themselves as the new head of the Muslim umma (community). They, then, confronted the members of the bereaved family with a fait accompli. This confrontation, most unfortunately, became a permanent feature of the history of the Muslims.

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, may God bless him and his Ahlul-Bayt (family), belonged to the clan of Banu Hashim. After his death in A.D. 632, his cousin, son-in-law and heir-apparent, Ali ibn Abi Talib, succeeded him as the new chief of Banu Hashim. Many of the companions of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, had nursed a secret antagonism toward him. They could not show him their antagonism during the lifetime of the Prophet but once they were in control of his government in Medina, they were resolved, not to let it fall, through any miscalculation, into the hands of Ali ibn Abi Talib. The members of the family of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, were thus precluded, by human force majeure, not only from direct succession but also from all positions of authority and power in the successive governments of his followers.

The friends, followers and supporters of the family of Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, have been historically called Shia; and the friends, followers and supporters of the companions, i.e., the party which succeeded in seizing power in Medina, have been called Sunni. I shall also identify these two groups by these names.

M. Shibli, the famous Indian historian of Islam, says that almost all histories of Islam have been written by Sunni historians. This statement implies that Shia scholars did not write any histories of Islam. Why not? They did not write history for an obvious reason. All khalifas, sultans and kings were Sunni. A Shia could not publish an interpretation of Islamic history that was divergent from the official interpretation, and he had no desire to perpetuate what he believed to be the distortions of truth. He, therefore, preferred not to write any history at all.

In this manner, it was the "official" account of the history of the early days of Islam that gained currency and found acceptance. It was the most logical thing for the governments of the early centuries of Islam to do to put into circulation only that story which was consistent with the party line. It was also most logical for the supporters of the policies of the governments in question, to toe the party line. And in toeing the

party line, if they felt that it was necessary to smother truth, or at any rate, to smother the other side of the story, it was just as logical to do so.

There is nothing strange, surprising or shocking in this attitude of the Sunni historians. The most logical thing for them to do, was, and is, to uphold the legitimacy of the events which transpired in Saqifa, where some of the companions, in a pre emptive strike, seized the government of Muhammad, the Sovereign of Arabia.

What however is strange, surprising and shocking, is that the Western historians of Islam, i.e., the Orientalists, have swallowed up, as gospel truth, whatever the Muslim "court" historians have dished out to them as "facts." The Orientalists are supposedly objective, non-partisan, and in no way emotionally involved. The outcome of a certain contest in the distant past of Islam, one way or the other, could not make any difference to them. And yet, the works of many of them reflect, not the facts but the interpretations and propagandas of the party in power. In this sense, their works are the imitations of the books "inspired" by what the Communists call the "ruling circles" of the Muslims.

The works of the Orientalists can have scientific value only if they heed the advice of the great historian of Muslim Spain, Dr. J. A. Conde. He says:

"A sort of fatality attaching itself to human affairs would seem to command that in the relation of historical events those of the highest importance should descend to posterity through the justly suspected channels of narrations written by the conquering parties. The mutation of empires, the most momentous revolutions and the overthrow of the most renowned dynasties seem all to be liable to this disadvantage. It was by the Romans that the history of their own aggrandizement was written; the narration of their rivalry and sanguinary wars with the Carthaginians has come down to us from themselves; or if Greek writers have also treated the subject, these men were the tributaries and dependents of Rome, nor did they spare the flatteries best calculated to conciliate her favor. Scipio thus appears to us the most admirable of heroes, but is not that in part because the history of his life is the work of his admirers and flatterers? It is true that the noble and illustrious Hannibal cannot look otherwise than great and glorious even in the narratives of his mortal enemies, but if the implacable hatred and aggressive policy of Rome had

not commanded the destruction of all the Punic annals, the renowned general would doubtless appear to us under an aspect differing much from that presented by the ruthless barbarian, described by Livy and accepted by his readers as the portrait of Hannibal. Therefore a sound and just discrimination forbids us to content ourselves with the testimony of one side only. This requires that we compare the relations of both parties with careful impartiality, and commands us to cite them with no other purpose than that of discovering the truth." (History of the Dominion of the Arabs in Spain translated from Spanish by Mrs. J. Foster, Volume I, page 1)

It cannot be gainsaid that many Orientalists have made most invaluable contributions to the study, knowledge and understanding of Islam. It is only through their labors that many priceless treasures of Islamic history, art and literature have been rescued from oblivion, and have been preserved. It is entirely possible that many such treasures would have been lost forever if it were not for their efforts to salvage them. Among them are men who have amazing grasp of the details of Islamic studies, and whose knowledge is encyclopedic in range. They have read and assimilated vast quantities of detail, and then they have condensed, organized and edited them in most masterly and critical analyses. Some of them devoted their lives and their fortunes to the study of Islam, and to them the world of Islam owes a profound debt of gratitude.

But notwithstanding the love of and zeal for knowledge, and devotion to truth of the Western students, it appears that when many of them interpret Islam, its history and its institutions, something goes awry. It is incredible but true that some of them show a curious inability to penetrate through the conventional and stereotyped appearance of events to the sometimes deliberately obscured facts and forces, and significant realities. And some of them fail even to see the obvious.

I have quoted above the principles of writing scientific and impartial history as laid down by Dr. Conde, who is himself a most distinguished Orientalist. The principle, viz., no expert judgments in history, rests upon plain common sense, and there is nothing mystical about it. And yet, many of the Orientalists have accepted, with a credulity that is idiotic, the account of the events that took place immediately following the death of Muhammad, as given by the party that succeeded in capturing his throne for itself.

A most glaring example of the gullibility, and basic misperception of the Orientalists, in this regard, is the acceptance by them, as a historical "fact" of the canard that Muhammad, the Messenger of God, died without designating anyone as his successor, and that he left the problem of finding a leader for the Muslim umma (community) to the discretion of his followers themselves.

No Orientalist has paused, as far as I am aware, to investigate if this is true or even plausible that Muhammad abandoned the Muslims without a leader, and they had to find one in a no-holds barred, ruthless, free-for-all, struggle for power. Eschewing the laborious search for truth, the Orientalists have merely concurred with the Sunni historians that Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, had no wishes or preferences in the matter of his own succession; and whatever happened in Saqifa was, therefore, right and justified, and also, was in the best interests of the Muslim umma (community).

This pro-Saqifa tilt of the Orientalists has led them up a blind alley in which they cannot find answers for some fundamental questions in the history of Islam, and they find themselves caught, like the Sunni historians, in a net of paradoxes and contradictions.

Many Sunni historians and many among the Orientalists have made a deliberate attempt to minimize the importance of the role played by Ali ibn Abi Talib in the story of Islam. They are, of course, entitled to their opinions and assumptions even if these are not attested by facts. In my presentation, I have made an attempt to place the emphasis on facts. In doing so, it has been my hope that the facts themselves would act as "judges". Since facts are impartial "judges," they can be counted upon to restore balance to the assessment of the roles played by the various protagonists in the history of nascent Islam. I have picked them up and have tried to string them, like pearls, into a "necklace", so that most of them can be seen in one place.

History has no supreme court rendering verdicts; it has only fallible chroniclers. And yet, history can find its own supreme court or objective tribunal in the logic of facts.

I have another and very pragmatic reason for depending upon facts. For writing the story of the early days of Islam, there are three primary sources, viz., Al-Qur'an al-Majid (the revealed book of Islam); the Hadith (the memorials of the attributed acts and sayings of Muhammad, as transmitted by a chain of informants or narrators); and the events as recorded by Arab historians. Out of these three, the first, i.e., the Qur'an, is acknowledged by all Muslims to be divine in origin. If a Muslim challenges the authority of Qur'an, he immediately becomes an apostate. But whereas the authority of Qur'an, as far as the Muslims are concerned, is inviolate, its verses are subject to varying and sometimes conflicting interpretations, and there is no such thing as a consensus on which or whose interpretation is right. The Hadith also suffer from a handicap; too many of them are spurious although there are some which are acknowledged both by the Sunnis and the Shias to be authentic. I have, therefore, made an attempt to be selective in quoting only those verses of Qur'an and only those Hadith (statements of the Prophet) in the interpretation of which the difference between the Sunnis and the Shias is minimal. But historical facts belong to an area in which there is not much room for disagreement.

I have made very frequent use of quotations, both from classical and modern historians, in this book, often on the same subject or event. I have done so to present to the reader more than one point of view or more than one interpretation of the more important events. The same event seen from different angles appears different to different observers and is, therefore, subject to different interpretations. It is in the hope that the reader shares this opinion that I have tried, on many occasions, to let more than one historian tell the same story. "Let the professionals do the job," has been my motto in the restatement of most of the vital facts of the history of Islam.

Another reason why I have presented testimony of the historians on such a vast scale, is to underpin my thesis with evidence, so that the reader, if he so wishes, may advert to sources which he may consider to be unimpeachable.

It has been said that daring as it is to investigate the unknown, even more so it is to question the known. Many of the so-called "known facts" in the history of nascent Islam are little more than pious assumptions or even pious wishes which through persistent repetition by the long chain of the generations of Muslims, have acquired the "patina" if not the

status of the "articles of faith". When I questioned some of the assumptions of many Muslims which are disguised as historical "truths", I noticed that they cannot withstand the scrutiny of critical analysis. The reader himself may, therefore, decide if he would cling to them or would accept truths some of which he might find extremely bitter and brutal. There are those people who are afraid of truth. Truth threatens their illusions, their favorite myths, and their assumptions. These latter, through long propinquity, have become so familiar to them that they feel it is safe and comfortable to live with them without the "intrusion" of truth. They equate truth with "insecurity." And yet, truth alone can bring them real security. Truth must be upheld at all costs, and by all, but especially, by the historians. Truth must be upheld even if it hurts a friend and benefits a foe. The first loyalty of the historian must be to truth, and nothing whatsoever must deflect him in its quest.

The war of ideas and the conflict of opinions become even more interesting when the spotlight of investigation is turned away from philosophical concepts and abstract political doctrines to characters and personalities which played the key roles in the events under review. History springs to life with characterization; it becomes vibrant with sharply delineated characters who "make" events or act on them or react to them. They invest history with the "human interest" element, and the touch of drama.

Whatever history is – accident, or inevitable causality, or the pressure of economic determinism, or the actions of strong leaders, or the result of forces nobody understands, or the collective aspirations of a people – whatever history is, the Arabs themselves see and interpret their own history more in terms of personal action than anything else. And they may be right. After all, as in every other area of endeavor, history is made by those who act. It consists, in the interaction, not of blind forces but of human beings. The conflicts of history are not between the abstractions of philosophy, economics or sociology but between human beings. It has been said that even in its most sociological moments, history cannot overlook the factor of human personality. The history of the first 23-years of the career of Islam which comprehends the entire ministry of Muhammad as the Messenger of God, is made, for the most part, next to himself, by the personal actions of his collaborator, Ali ibn Abi Talib. This is the testimony of history. But it is a testimony which many

historians have consistently tried to conceal. It is to this testimony that I have tried to draw the attention of the readers of this book.

But notwithstanding the past and present lopsidedness of Western historiography on Islam, there is new hope that historians of the future will make restitution for the omissions and failures of the historians of the past. All that they have to do is not to be tendentious, and not to accept blindly those interpretations and conclusions which have become the clichés of the history of Islam, but to rediscover truth for themselves through collation and examination of the evidence.

In the introduction to the Cambridge History of Islam, Volume I, published by the University Press, Cambridge (1970), P.M. Holt, writes:

"The study of Islamic history is now developing, many of the apparent certainties of the older Western historiography (often reflecting the assertions and interpretations of the Muslim traditional historians) have dissolved, and it is only gradually through detailed research that a truer understanding of the past may be attained."

The certainties of the older Western historiography reflecting the assertions and interpretations of the Muslim traditional historians have not dissolved yet but let us hope that they will, and a truer understanding of the past will be attained in due course.

An attempt to interpret the history of Islam, especially the history of its first century, is like stepping into a mine field; it's seething with controversy, diatribes and polemics, and one may approach it only extremely gingerly. Nevertheless, interpretation remains basic to the understanding of history. Without interpretation, history becomes a mass of uncoordinated information and a catalogue of "dead" events and dates unrelated to each other. Yet these "dead" events bounce back to life when effects are related to causes, and a concatenation of facts is established. A fact in correlation with other facts has historical significance; in isolation it may be meaningless.

Even Einstein's Relativity is the understanding of the world not as a series of events but as relations.

As stated above, there is a plethora of books on Islam but most of them are stereotypical interpretations of the story of its birth and growth, and its religious experience, just as handed down to their authors by the court historians of the government which was born in Saqifa, and its successor governments – the governments of Damascus and Baghdad. The story, however, has another side also.

A principle of the ancient Roman law was audi alteram partem (in any dispute, hear the other side); or audiatur et altera pars (let the other side be heard). Concerted human action – which is called politics – is full of immense, heart-breaking tragedies that have damaged the lives of everyone on the planet. Most would have been averted had this law been heeded by all.

This principle that in any dispute, both sides of the case should be heard – is entrenched in the legal systems of most nations, but most particularly in those of the United States and Western Europe. Thomas Jefferson was only paraphrasing this principle, without which there cannot be any justice, when he exclaimed: "For God's sake, let us freely hear both sides." The American and European students of Islam, in most cases, have heard only one side of its story; this book is an attempt to present the other side. It is with this intent that I deliver it to the judgment of its readers.

From the cowardice which shrinks from new truth;
From the laxness that is content with half-truth;
From the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth;
O God of Truth deliver us!

Transliteration

The system of transliteration employed in this book was devised with particular regard for simplicity. In most cases, those forms of spelling for names of persons and places have been used which are most familiar to Western readers, such as Qur'an, Muhammad, and Yemen in preference to Coran, Koran or Kuran, Mohammad, and al-Yaman. At the same time, some other forms of Western usage such as Moslems, Sunnites and Shi'ites have been discarded in favor of the simpler and more correct forms such as Muslims, Sunnis and Shias.

The Arabic word for "son" is transliterated to conform with the Arabic spelling as ibn or bin, and both variants have been used.

The words caliph and khalifa or caliphate and khilafat have been used interchangeably.

Chapter 2

The Geography of Arabia

It is a convention of historians to begin the history of a region with its geography. They do so partly because the drama of history is played out in the "theater" of its geographical backdrop; and partly because of the factor known in geopolitics as the "determinism of geography." It has been said that not only institutions but geography, climate, and many other conditions unite to form the influences which acting through successive generations, shape up the character of individuals and nations, and character plays a vital role in shaping up their history.

The Arabian peninsula is the cradle of Islam. Islam was "born" in it, and "grew up" in it, and was already "full-grown" when it came out of it. It was in the Arabian cities of Makkah and Medina that the classic Islamic identity was evolved, and Islam actually "jelled." A grasp of the geography of Arabia, therefore, is necessary for the understanding of the drift of its history.

Following is a synopsis of the geography of the Arabian peninsula:

Arabia, like any other region, has the kind of terrain that molds and modifies those who live in it and move through it. It's a stern, grim and inhospitable land, and is or was, until the obtrusion of oil, a constant challenge for survival to the wits of man. His survival in it depended upon his ability to come to terms with it.

Contrary to popular notions, Arabia is not all a wilderness of sand. It has considerable variety in the configuration of its surface, the salient features of which are broiling sand, mauve mountains, jagged gulches, grotesque peaks spiking a copper sky, friable rocks, flinty plains, startling geometrical and conical shapes of crags, constantly shifting sand dunes and oases, and mirages of lakes, streams and gardens.

Though most of the surface of the desert is bleak and desolate, Arabia has many parts which are highly photogenic. They possess a peculiar, rhythmic, haunting, elusive and illusive beauty – the beauty of textured

sand, which like the waves of the sea, is forever in motion. This beauty is even more evanescent than the beauty of the patterns of fern and feather in frost, and even more ephemeral than the cosmetic of freshly-fallen snow. The ripples of sand extend as far as the horizons and beyond, in a world of silence and emptiness. The sun makes bright scales on the sand, and the wind makes strange, surrealistic, and "futuristic" patterns in it only to obliterate them a few moments later. Thus the wind is constantly creating, destroying and recreating beauty. And this beauty, in all its infinite similitudes, is born to blush unseen in the desert air, and to perish and vanish unsung. In the immensity of sand, the landscape keeps changing and assuming forever newer and more fantastic shapes, and keeps erratically "moving" from one place to another. Sand can be piled up into massive dunes which can rise more than 150 meters above bedrock. Depending on the direction and force of the wind, the dunes assume a variety of shapes like the spectacular crescent moon or long parallel ridges or great pyramidal massifs which may be called sand mountains.

If the desert has many faces, it also has many moods, and most of them are unpredictable. One moment it may be deceptively benign and tranquil but the very next moment, it may become vicious, temperamental, menacing and treacherous like a turbulent ocean. Whole caravans of men, camels and horses, are said to have disappeared in it, devoured, as if, by the cruel and hungry sands.

In a sandstorm which can last for several days, the sun, the moon, the stars, the contours of the landscape and the horizons are all obliterated, and towering columns of dust spin crazily, flashing surreal shadows over the surface of the roiling desert. In summer, the vertical sun generates thermal whirlwinds which scorch the land as if with a torch, and the desert becomes a composite of two elements – heat and sand. Sometimes a dust storm is followed by a brisk shower which sports a "double-rainbow" – a full rainbow inset with a smaller one. Thus horror and beauty both fit strangely into the "life-cycle" of the desert.

But through it all and forever, the desert remains remote, silent, sinister, savage, forbidding and formidable; and it remains overwhelming in its vast and awesome loneliness. Some people believe that the brooding desert has its own "mystique" which profoundly affects men. It is against this backdrop that the Arab – the son of the desert – played out his life.

Arabia is the world's largest peninsula but the Arabs themselves call it Jazirat-ul-Arab (the Island of Arabia), which in a sense it is. Bounded on the east by the Persian Gulf, on the south by the Arabian Sea, and on the

west by the Red Sea, it is bounded on the north by the great "sand sea" of the Syrian desert.

In outline, Arabia is a quadrilateral with an area of 1.2 million square miles. The Red Sea littoral from the Gulf of Aqaba in the north to the Bab-el-Mendeb in the south, is 1200 miles long; and the distance from Bab-el-Mendeb in the west to Ras-el-Hadd in the east is roughly the same.

In configuration, Arabia is a vast plateau rising gently from east to west. Except for Yemen and the valleys interspersed in the western mountain ranges, the whole country is sandy or rocky, and dry and barren.

Following are the political divisions of the Arabian peninsula (1992):

1. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
2. The Republic of Yemen
3. The Sultanate of Oman
4. The United Arab Emirates
5. The State of Qatar
6. The State of Bahrain
7. The State of Kuwait

Following is a brief description of each of these seven political units:

1.The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia accounts for 850,000 square miles of the Arabian peninsula. Its population is estimated at ten million, and its capital is Riyadh.

The "maritime" provinces of the Kingdom are Hijaz and Aseer on the Red Sea. The narrow coastal plain of Tihama runs parallel to the Red Sea.

The twin cities of Makkah and Medina are in the province of Hijaz. Hijaz, therefore, is the holy land of Islam. The population of Hijaz is estimated at two million, and its area is 135,000 square miles. Other cities and towns in Hijaz are Jeddah, the port of Makkah, and the country's major commercial center; Yenbo, the port of Medina; Ta'if, a hill station in the south-east of Makkah, and the summer capital of the kingdom; Khyber, Tabuk and Tayma.

The "Great Design" of Islam was perfected in Hijaz, and the history of its birth and growth is inextricably bound up with this province which makes it the hub of the Muslim world.

Aseer is the relatively fertile strip of coastal plains and mountains in the south-west, north of Yemen, with some peaks rising as high as 10,000 feet, and sufficient rainfall to permit terraced farming. The famous hill

station of Abha and the important agricultural settlement of Jizan are in Aseer. Jizan is the port for Aseer.

Najd is the central highland of Arabia with a mean elevation of 3000 feet. The dominant feature of its topography is the mountain system called Tuwayq. Riyadh, the capital of the kingdom, is in Najd. The oases of Buraydah and Hayil are in the northern part of Najd.

Al-Hasa or the Eastern Province is on the Persian Gulf. All the oil and gas of the kingdom are found in this province. It also has the important oases ofHofuf and Qatif. The leading commercial centers of the province are Al-Khobar and the port city of Dammam. Other important cities are Dhahran and Ras Tanura.

The Ruba'-al-Khali (the Empty Quarter) in the south is the largest continuous body of sand in the world, and covers an area of 250,000 square miles. To the Arabs, it is known simply as "Ar-Ramal" (the Sands). It is an almost lifeless desert, and is one of the most isolated and desolate regions of the world.

An-Nufud in the north of the peninsula is the second largest desert in Arabia. It is 30,000 square miles in area.

2. The Republic of Yemen

The Republic of Yemen is in the south and south-west of the Arabian peninsula, with a population of 11 million and an area of 190,000 square miles. It is the only part of the peninsula that receives monsoon rains, making it the most fertile and populous part of the area. The highest mountain of Arabia, An-Nabi Sho'aib, is in Yemen, and reaches a height of 12,350 feet.

Sana'ais the capital and the largest city in the country. It is at an elevation of 7200 feet, and is noted for its healthful climate. Aden is the commercial capital. Al-Mocha, Al-Hodaydah, Ta'izz, and Mukalla are other cities. Sayun and Shibam are towns which are famous for their skyscrapers.

3. The Sultanate of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman occupies the south-east corner of the Arabian peninsula and consists of the regions of Oman and Dhofar. It has a population of one million and an area of 90,000 square miles. Muscat is the capital and Matrah is the largest town.

4. The United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates comprise the seven states of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ajman, Sharjah, Fujairah, Ras el-Khaimah, and Umm el-Quiwain. They add up to a total of 32,000 square miles, and a population of

500,000. The capital of the Union is Abu Dhabi which is also the largest and most important city of the Emirates.

5. The State of Qatar

Qatar has an area of 4250 square miles and a population of 200,000. Its capital is Doha. Qatar has the smallest population of any Arab state.

6. The State of Bahrain

Bahrain is a group of 30 islands, with a total area of 240 square miles, and a population of 300,000. Manama, the capital, is on Bahrain Island, and Muharraq is the second largest city in the group of islands.

7. The State of Kuwait

Kuwait is 6200 square miles in area, and has a population of 1.5 million. Kuwait City is the capital.

Climate

Although the Tropic of Cancer passes through the center of the Arabian peninsula, the land is not tropical. Its summers are long and extremely hot, with temperatures rising as high as 130 degrees Fahrenheit in many places. Winters are short and cold. Rainfall is scanty, averaging four inches a year. The south-west corner, however, gets relatively heavy rainfall, as much as twenty inches.

Vegetation

Vegetation is generally very sparse due to lack of rain and due to the high salt content of the soil. True trees are rare, and shrubs are common. All plants have had to adapt themselves to the conditions of desert existence.

The date-palm grows wherever there is water. It is the most important cultivated tree in the whole peninsula. Date fruit is the staple of many Arabs, and the tree supplies valuable wood and other by-products. Tamarisk and acacia trees are also found in many parts of the country.

The principal cereals of Arabia are wheat, barley, oats, maize and millet. Coffee grows in Yemen; and cotton grows, in varying quantities, in Yemen and in Oman. The mango fruit has been successfully cultivated in the oases of Al-Hasa province of Saudi Arabia, and the coconut palm grows in Oman. Such "forests" as Arabia has, are a few clusters of junipers in the highlands of Yemen.

The Ecology of Arabia The most important component of the ecology of the Arabian peninsula is water. Its presence or absence has shaped its history to a great extent. Settlers were attracted to the site of Makkah in Hijaz by the presence of the spring discovered by Hajra, the wife of Ibrahim and the mother of Ismael, and was named by her as Zamzam.

Assured by the availability of its tart waters in all seasons, they built the city of Makkah around it.

The hydrosphere of the region consists of wells, torrents and flash-floods. The whole area is devoid of rivers and streams with the exception of the sixty-mile long Hajar in the Republic of Yemen. But even this is not a perennial stream; it becomes a stream only when torrential rains fall in its basin.

A new and complex factor of tremendous geopolitical significance is the presence of vast reservoirs of oil in the Arabian peninsula. In 1900 the whole peninsula was thinly populated, and was desolate, poverty-stricken and isolated. It was one of the few regions in the world almost untouched by western influence. Then came oil and everything changed. Saudi Arabia sold her first concession in 1923, and the first producing well was drilled in 1938. Within a few years, annual revenues from petroleum exceeded $1 million. The kingdom passed the $1 billion mark in 1970; the $100 billion mark in 1980. Life in Saudi Arabia and in the other oil producing sheikdoms in the Persian Gulf was transformed by the effects of the new wealth – spectacular fortunes, rapid economic development, the arrival of foreign labor, international clout – perhaps more radically than life has been transformed anywhere else at any time in human experience.

The oil wealth is changing the face of the land in numerous parts of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf sheikdoms. It has made it possible to enlist modern technology to draw water from great depths or to convert sea water through desalination, and to bring barren lands under cultivation by using it for irrigation. Reclamation of land for farming is also changing the demographic character of the peninsula. Nomadic tribes are striking roots in permanent settlements wherever availability of water is assured.Most sophisticated techniques are being applied in an attempt to control sand movement and to tame a hostile environment.

The most important animal in Arabia was the camel. The Arabian camel is the single-humped variety, or dromedary, as against the two-humped camel of Central Asia, the Bactrian. The dromedary has flat, broad, thick-soled cloven hoofs that do not sink into the sand, and it can travel long distances in the desert. The milk of the camel formed an important part of the diet of the desert Arabs, and camel hair was used by them to make their tents. The camel, therefore, was indispensable for survival in the desert.

But amazingly and incredibly, the camel has almost disappeared from Saudi Arabia and all the sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf. William J. Polk

writes in his book, Passing Brave, published by Alfred A. Knopf, New York, in 1973:

"Shortly before his death in 1960, the great English desert explorer, St. John Philby, prophesied that within thirty years Arabia would have no camels. He was laughed at then but today it seems that his prophecy may have been overly generous. The camel and its parasite, the nomad, have almost disappeared from Arabia. Thus the era which began about 3000 years ago with the domestication of the camel, is ending. The camel has played a major role in the rise of civilization."

Diesel trucks, trains, and jet airplanes have taken the place of camels and camel caravans. Most Arabs now travel by automobile or by air. The camels and the camel caravans have become "obsolete" in Arabia.

Chapter 3

Arabia Before Islam

In writing the history of Islam, it is customary to begin with a survey of the political, economic, social and religious conditions of Arabia on the eve of the Proclamation by Muhammad (may God bless him and his Ahlul-Bait) of his mission as Messenger of God. It is the second convention of the historians (the first being to give a geographical description of the region). I shall also abide by this convention, and will review briefly, the general conditions in Arabia in the late sixth and early seventh century A.D.

Political Conditions in Arabia

The most remarkable feature of the political life of Arabia before Islam was the total absence of political organization in any form. With the exception of Yemen in the south-west, no part of the Arabian peninsula had any government at any time, and the Arabs never acknowledged any authority other than the authority of the chiefs of their tribes. The authority of the tribal chiefs, however, rested, in most cases, on their character and personality, and was moral rather than political.

The modern student of history finds it incredible that the Arabs lived, generation after generation, century after century, without a government of any kind. Since there was no government, there was no law and no order. The only law of the land was lawlessness. In the event a crime was committed, the injured party took law in its own hands, and tried to administer "justice" to the offender. This system led very frequently to acts of horrendous cruelty.

If the Arab ever exercised any modicum of restraint, it was not because of any susceptibility he had to questions of right or wrong but because of

the fear of provoking reprisals and vendetta. Vendetta consumed whole generations of Arabs. Since there were no such things as police, courts or judges, the only protection a man could find from his enemies, was in his own tribe. The tribe had an obligation to protect its members even if they had committed crimes. Tribalism or ‘asabiyya (the clan spirit) took precedence over ethics. A tribe that failed to protect its members from their enemies, exposed itself to ridicule, obloquy and contempt. Ethics, of course, did not enter the picture anywhere.

Since Arabia did not have a government, and since the Arabs were anarchists by instinct, they were locked up in ceaseless warfare. War was a permanent institution of the Arabian society. The desert could support only a limited number of people, and the state of inter-tribal war maintained a rigid control over the growth of population. But the Arabs themselves did not see war in this light. To them, war was a pastime or rather a dangerous sport, or a species of tribal drama, waged by professionals, according to old and gallant codes, while the "audience" cheered. Eternal peace held no appeal for them, and war provided an escape from drudgery and from the monotony of life in the desert. They, therefore, courted the excitement of the clash of arms. War gave them an opportunity to display their skills at archery, fencing and horsemanship, and also, in war, they could distinguish themselves by their heroism and at the same time win glory and honor for their tribes. In many cases, the Arabs fought for the sake of fighting, whether or not there was a cause belli.

G. E. Grunebaum

"In the century before the rise of Islam the tribes dissipated all their energies in tribal guerrilla fighting, all against all." (Classical Islam – A History 600-1258 – 1970)

The nomadic tribes ranged over the peninsula and plundered the caravans and the small settlements. Many caravans and villages bought immunity from these raids by paying a fixed amount of money to the nomadic freebooters.

It is important to grasp the fact that on the eve of the birth of Islam there was no government at any level in Arabia, and this fact may even have affected the rise of Islam itself.The total absence of government, even in its most rudimentary form, was a phenomenon so extraordinary

that it has been noted and commented upon by many orientalists, among them:

D. S. Margoliouth

"Arabia would have remained pagan had there been a man in Mecca who could strike a blow; who would act. But many as were Mohammed's ill-wishers, there was not one of them who had this sort of courage; and (as has been seen) there was no magistracy by which he could be tried." (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, 1931)

Maxime Rodinson

"Manslaughter carried severe penalties according to the unwritten law of the desert. In practice the free Arabs were bound by no written code of law, and no state existed to enforce its statutes with the backing of a police force.The only protection for a man's life was the certainty established by custom, that it would be dearly bought. Blood for blood and a life for a life. The vendetta, tha'r in Arabic, is one of the pillars of Bedouin society." (Mohammed, 1971)

Herbert J. Muller

"In Mohammed's Arabia there was no state – there were only scattered independent tribes and towns. The Prophet formed his own state, and he gave it a sacred law prescribed by Allah." (The Loom of History, 1958)

The population of Arabia consisted of two main divisions, sedentary and nomadic. Hijaz and South Arabia were dotted with many small and a few large towns. The rest of the country had a floating population composed of Bedouins. They were backward in the civil and political sense but they were also a source of anxiety and fear for the sedentary population. They lived as pirates of the desert, and they were notorious for their unrestrained individualism and anarchic tribal particularism.

The more important tribes exercised a certain amount of authority in their respective areas. In Makkah the dominant tribe was the Quraysh; in Yathrib, the dominant tribes were the Arab tribes of Aus and Khazraj, and the Jewish tribes of Nadheer, Qaynuqaa and Qurayza. The Quraysh of Makkah considered themselves superior to the Bedouins but the latter

had only contempt for the town-dwellers who for them were only a "nation of shopkeepers."

All Arabs were notorious for certain characteristics such as arrogance, conceit, boastfulness, vindictiveness and excessive love of plunder. Their arrogance was partly responsible for their failure to establish a state of their own. They lacked political discipline, and until the rise of Islam, never acknowledged any authority as paramount in Arabia.

They acknowledged the authority of a man who led them into a foray but he could command their obedience only if they had an assurance of receiving a fair share of the booty, and his authority lapsed as soon as the expedition was over.

Economic Conditions

Economically, the Jews were the leaders of Arabia. They were the owners of the best arable lands in Hijaz, and they were the best farmers in the country. They were also the entrepreneurs of such industries as existed in Arabia in those days, and they enjoyed a monopoly of the armaments industry.

Slavery was an economic institution of the Arabs. Male and female slaves were sold and bought like animals, and they formed the most depressed class of the Arabian society.

The most powerful class of the Arabs was made up by the capitalists and money-lenders. The rates of interest which they charged on loans were exorbitant, and were especially designed to make them richer and richer, and the borrowers poorer and poorer.

The most important urban centers of Arabia were Makkah and Yathrib, both in Hijaz. The citizens of Makkah were mostly merchants, traders and money-lenders. Their caravans traveled in summer to Syria and in winter to Yemen. They also traveled to Bahrain in the east and to Iraq in the northeast. The caravan trade was basic to the economy of Makkah, and its organization called for considerable skill, experience and ability.

R. V. C. Bodley

The arrivals and departures of caravans were important events in the lives of the Meccans. Almost everyone in Mecca had some kind of investment in the fortunes of the thousands of camels, the hundreds of men, horses, and donkeys which went out with hides, raisins, and silver bars, and came back with oils, perfumes and manufactured goods from Syria, Egypt and Persia, and with spices and gold from the south. (The Messenger, 1946, p. 31)

In Yathrib, the Arabs made their living by farming, and the Jews made theirs as businessmen and industrialists. But the Jews were not exclusively businessmen and industrialists; among them also there were many farmers, and they had brought much waste land under cultivation.

Economically, socially and politically, Hijaz was the most important province in Arabia in the early seventh century.

Francesco Gabrieli

On the eve of Islam the most complex and advanced human aggregate of the Arabian peninsula lived in the city of the Quraysh. The hour of the south Arab kingdoms, of Petra and Palmyra, had passed for some time in the history of Arabia. Now the future was being prepared there, in Hijaz (The Arabs – A Compact History, 1963)

The Arabs and the Jews both practiced usury. Many among them were professional usurers; they lived on the interest they charged on their loans.

E. A. Belyaev

"Usury (riba) was widely practiced in Mecca, for in order to participate in the profitable caravan trade many a Meccan who had only a modest income had to resort to usurers; despite the high interest, he could hope to benefit after the safe return of the caravan. The richer merchants were both traders and usurers.

Money-lenders usually took a dinar for a dinar, a dirhem for a dirhem, in other words, 100 per cent interest. In the Koran 3:125, Allah addressing the faithful, prescribes: ‘Do not practice usury doubled twofold.' This could mean that interests of 200 or even 400 per cent were demanded.

The nets of Meccan usury caught not only fellow-citizens and tribesmen but also members of the Hijazi Bedouin tribes active in the Meccan trade. As in ancient Athens, 'the principal means of oppressing the people's freedom were money and usury." (Arabs, Islam and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages, 1969)

Social Conditions

Arabia was a male-dominated society. Women had no status of any kind other than as sex objects.The number of women a man could marry was not fixed. When a man died, his son "inherited" all his wives except his own mother. A savage custom of the Arabs was to bury their female infants alive. Even if an Arab did not wish to bury his daughter alive, he still had to uphold this "honorable" tradition, being unable to resist social pressures.

Drunkenness was a common vice of the Arabs. With drunkenness went their gambling. They were compulsive drinkers and compulsive gamblers. The relations of the sexes were extremely loose. Many women sold sex to make their living since there was little else they could do. These women flew flags on their houses, and were called "ladies of the flags" (dhat-er-rayyat).

Sayyid Qutb of Egypt in his book, Milestones, published by the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, Salimiah, Kuwait in 1978 (pp. 48, 49), has quoted the famous traditionalist, Imam Bukhari, on the institution of marriage in Arabia before Islam as follows:

The Shihab (az-Suhri) said: 'Urwah b. az-Zubayr informed him that Aishah, the wife of the Prophet (God bless and preserve him), informed him that marriage in the Jahiliyah was of four types:

1. One was the marriage of people as it is today, where a man betroths his ward or his daughter to another man, and the latter assigns a dower (bridewealth) to her and then marries her.

2. Another type was where a man said to his wife when she was purified from her menses, 'Send to N and ask to have intercourse with him;' her husband then stays away from her and does not touch her at all until it is clear that she is pregnant from that (other) man with whom she

sought intercourse. When it is clear that she is pregnant, her husband has intercourse with her if he wants. He acts thus simply from the desire for a noble child. This type of marriage was (known as) nikah al-istibda, the marriage of seeking intercourse.

3. Another type was when a group (raht) of less than ten men used to visit the same woman and all of them had to have intercourse with her. If she became pregnant and bore a child, when some nights had passed after the birth she sent for them, and not a man of them might refuse. When they had come together in her presence, she would say to them, 'You (pl.) know the result of your acts; I have borne a child and he is your (sing.) child, N.' – naming whoever she will by his name. Her child is attached to him, and the man may not refuse.

4. The fourth type is when many men frequent a woman, and she does not keep herself from any who comes to her. These women are the baghaya (prostitutes). They used to set up at their doors banners forming a sign. Whoever wanted them went in to them. If one of them conceived and bore a child, they gathered together to her and summoned the physiognomists. Then they attached her child to the man whom they thought (the father), and the child remained attached to him and was called his son, no objection to this course being possible. When Muhammad (God bless and preserve him) came preaching the truth, he destroyed all the types of marriage of the Jahiliya except that which people practice today.

The State of Religion in Pre-Islamic Arabia

The period in the Arabian history which preceded the birth of Islam is known as the Times of Ignorance. Judging by the beliefs and the practices of the pagan Arabs, it appears that it was a most appropriate name. The Arabs were the devotees of a variety of "religions" which can be classified into the following categories.

1. Idol-worshippers or polytheists. Most of the Arabs were idolaters. They worshipped numerous idols and each tribe had its own idol or idols and fetishes. They had turned the Kaaba in Makkah, which according to tradition, had been built by the Prophet Abraham and his son, Ismael, and was dedicated by them to the service of One God, into a heathen pantheon housing 360 idols of stone and wood.

2. Atheists This group was composed of the materialists and believed that the world was eternal.

3. Zindiqs They were influenced by the Persian doctrine of dualism in nature. They believed that there were two gods representing the twin forces of good and evil or light and darkness, and both were locked up in an unending struggle for supremacy.

4. Sabines. They worshipped the stars.

5. Jews When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and drove the Jews out of Palestine and Syria, many of them found new homes in Hijaz in Arabia. Under their influence, many Arabs also became converts to Judaism. Their strong centers were the towns of Yathrib, Khayber, Fadak and Umm-ul-Qura.

6. Christians. The Romans had converted the north Arabian tribe of Ghassan to Christianity. Some clans of Ghassan had migrated to and had settled in Hijaz. In the south, there were many Christians in Yemen where the creed was originally brought by the Ethiopian invaders. Their strong center was the town of Najran.

7. Monotheists There was a small group of monotheists present in Arabia on the eve of the rise of Islam. Its members did not worship idols, and they were the followers of the Prophet Abraham. The members of the families of Muhammad, the future prophet, and Ali ibn Abi Talib, the future caliph, and most members of their clan – the Banu Hashim – belonged to this group.

Education Among the Arabs Before Islam

Among the Arabs there were extremely few individuals who could read and write. Most of them were not very eager to learn these arts. Some historians are of the opinion that the culture of the period was almost entirely oral. The Jews and the Christians were the custodians of such knowledge as Arabia had. The greatest intellectual accomplishment of the pagan Arabs was their poetry. They claimed that God had bestowed the most remarkable qualities of the head upon the Greeks (its proof is their science and philosophy); of hand upon the Chinese (its

proof is their craftsmanship); and of the tongue upon the Arabs (its proof is their eloquence). Their greatest pride, both before and after Islam, was their eloquence and poetry. The importance of poetry to them can be gauged by the following testimony:

D. S. Margoliouth

In nomad Arabia, the poets were part of the war equipment of the tribe; they defended their own, and damaged hostile tribes by the employment of a force which was supposed indeed to work mysteriously, but which in fact consisted in composing dexterous phrases of a sort that would attract notice, and would consequently be diffused and remembered widely. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, 1931)

E. A. Belyaev

Most of the information on the economic conditions, social regime and mores of the Arabs in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., comes from ancient Arabic or pre-Islamic poetry, known for its ‘photographic faithfulness' to all phases of Arabian tribal life and its environment. Specialists, therefore, accept this poetry as the ‘most important and authoritative source for describing the Arab people and their customs' in this period (Arabs, Islam and the Arab Caliphatein the Early Middle Ages, 1969)

Arabic poetry was rich in eloquence and imagery but it was limited in range, and was lacking in profundity. Its content might be interesting but it was stereotyped. The masterpieces of their poetry follow almost exactly the same sequence of ideas and images. It was, nevertheless, a faithful mirror of life in ancient Arabia. Also, in cultivating the art of poetry, the Arab poets were, unconsciously, developing one of the greatest artifacts of mankind, the Arabic language.

The greatest compositions of the pagan Arabs were the so-called "Golden Odes," a collection of seven poems, supposedly of unsurpassed excellence in spontaneity, power and eloquence. They were suspended in Kaaba as a challenge to any aspiring genius to excel or to match them. Sir William Muir writes about these poems as follows:

The Seven Suspended Poems still survive from a period anterior even to Mohammed, a wondrous specimen of artless eloquence. The beauty of

the language and wild richness of the imagery are acknowledged by the European reader; but the subject of the poet was limited, and the beaten track seldom deviated from. The charm of his mistress, the envied spot marked by the still fresh traces of her encampment, the solitude of her deserted haunts, his generosity and prowess, the unrivaled glory of his tribe, the noble qualities of his camel - these were the themes which, with little variation of treatment, and with no contrivance whatever of plot or story, occupied the Arab muse – and some of them only added fuel to the besetting vices of the people, vainglory, envy, vindictiveness and pride (The Life of Mohammed, 1877)

With the rise of Islam the emphasis shifted, temporarily, from poetry to prose, and poetry lost its prestigious position as the "queen" of the arts of Arabia.

The greatest "composition" of Islam was Al-Qur’an al-Majid, the Scripture of Islam, and it was in prose. Muslims believe that Qur’an was "composed" in Heaven before it was revealed to Muhammad, the Messenger of God. They believe that human genius can never produce anything that can match its style or contents. For the last fifty generations, it has been, for them, a model of literary, philosophical, theological, legal, metaphysical and mystical thought.

An attempt has been made in the foregoing pages to portray the general state of Arabia and the lifestyle of the Arabs before Islam. This "portrait" is authentic as it has been drawn from the "archives" of the pre-Islamic Arabs themselves.

Judging by this portrait, it appears that Arabia before Islam was without social amenity or historical depth, and the Arabs lived in moral bankruptcy and spiritual servitude. Life for them was devoid of meaning, purpose and direction. The human spirit was in chains, and was awaiting, as it were, a signal, to make a titanic struggle, to break loose and to become free.

The signal was given in A.D. 610 by Muhammad, the son of Abdullah, in the city of Makkah, when he proclaimed his mission of prophethood, and launched the movement called Islam on its world-girdling career.

Islam was the greatest blessing for mankind ever. It set men and women free, through obedience to their Creator, from slavery in all its manifestations. Muhammad, the Messenger of God, was the supreme emancipator of mankind. He extricated man from the "pits of life."

The Arabian peninsula was geographically peripheral and politically terra incognito until the early seventh century A.D. It was then that Muhammad put it on the political map of the world by making it the theater of momentous events of history.

Before Islam, the Arabs had played only a marginal role in the history of the Middle East, and they would have remained forever a nation of animists and shepherds if Muhammad (may God bless him and his Ahlul-Bait) had not provided them the focus and the stimulus that welded their scattered nomadic tribes into a purposeful driving force. He molded a "nation" out of a rough mass without basic structure. He invested the Arabs with a new dynamism, idealism and explosive creativity, and they changed the course of history. He created an entirely new mental and psychological ecology, and his work placed an emphatic period in world history; it was the end of one era and the beginning of another.

Writing about this watershed in history, Francesco Gabrieli says in his book, The Arabs – A Compact History, (1963):

Thus terminated the pagan prelude in the history of the Arabian people. Whoever compares it with what followed, which gave the Arabs a primary role on the stage of world, and inspired high thoughts and high works, not only to an exceptional man emerged from their bosom, but to an entire elite which for several generations gathered and promoted his word, cannot but notice the leap that the destinies of this people assume here. The rhythm of its life, until then, weak and dispersed, was to find a unity, a propulsive center, a goal; and all this under the sign of religious faith. No romantic love for the primitive can make us fail to recognize that without Mohammed and Islam they would have probably remained vegetating for centuries in the desert, destroying themselves in the bloodletting of their internecine wars, looking at Byzantium, at Ctesiphon and even at Axum as distant beacons of civilization completely out of their reach.

Chapter 4

Banu Hashim - Before the Birth of Islam

In the fifth century A.D. a man called Qusay, was born in the tribe of Quraysh. He won great honor and fame for his tribe by his wisdom. He rebuilt the Kaaba which was in a state of disrepair, and he ordered the Arabs to build their houses around it. He also built the "town hall" of Makkah, the first one in Arabia. The leaders of the various clans gathered in this hall to ponder upon their social, commercial, cultural and political problems. Qusay formulated laws for the supply of food and water to the pilgrims who came to Makkah, and he persuaded the Arabs to pay a tax for their support.

Edward Gibbon

Qusay, born about A.D. 400, the great-grandfather of Abdul-Muttalib, and consequently fifth in the ascending line from Mohammed, obtained supreme power at Mecca. (The decline and fall of the Roman Empire)

Qusay died in A.D. 480, and his son, Abd Manaf, took charge of his duties. He too distinguished himself by his ability. He was noted for his generosity and good judgment. He was succeeded by his son Hashim. It was this Hashim who gave his name to the clan which became famous in history as Banu Hashim.Hashim was an extraordinary man. It was he who made the Quraysh merchants and merchant princes. He was the first man who instituted the two caravan journeys of Quraysh, summer and winter, and the first to provide thareed (broth) to the Arabs. But for him, the Arabs might have remained shepherds forever.

Enlightened and benevolent leadership and generosity were only two out of many qualities which Muhammad, the future prophet, "inherited" from his fore-fathers. Hashim was married to a woman of Yathrib and from her he had a son – Abdul Muttalib. In due course, Abdul Muttalib was to succeed his father as the chief of the clan of Hashim.

Edward Gibbon

The grandfather of Mohammed(Abdul Muttalib), and his lineal ancestors, appear in foreign and domestic transactions as the princes of their country; but they reigned, like Percales at Athens, or the Medics at Florence, by the opinion of their wisdom and integrity; their influence was divided with their patrimony.

The tribe of Koreish, by fraud or force (sic), had acquired the custody of the Kaaba; the sacerdotal office devolved through four lineal descents to the grandfather of Mohammed; and the family of Hashemites, from whence he sprang, was the most respectable and sacred in the eyes of their country. Mohammed's descent from Ismael was a national privilege or fable (sic); but if the first steps of the pedigree are dark and doubtful (sic), he could produce many generations of pure and genuine nobility; he sprang from the tribe of Koreish and the family of Hashim, the most illustrious of the Arabs, the princes of Mecca, and the hereditary guardians of the Kaaba. (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

Hashim had a younger brother called Al-Muttalib, the son of Abd Manaf. For a time, he was chief of the clan, and when he died, his nephew – Abdul Muttalib – the son of Hashim, succeeded him as the new chief. Abdul Muttalib exhibited all the qualities which had made the names of his father and grandfather great and famous.

As noted before, the city of Makkah, like the rest of Arabia, was without a government and without a ruler, but it was dominated by the tribe of Quraysh. Quraysh was composed of twelve clans, and Banu Hashim was one of them. Reacting to the depravity of the times, the members of Banu Hashim, were prompted, a half-century before the birth of Muhammad, to make some tentative efforts to arrest the moral decline of the Arabs and to improve the social, economic and intellectual climate of the country. They, therefore, forged the League of the Virtuous. The major aims of the League were to prevent wars from breaking out and to protect the weak and the defenseless from their enemies.

The Banu Hashim also interested itself in the economic welfare of the Arabs, and inaugurated a system of trade with neighboring countries by sending caravans to Syria in summer and to Yemen in winter, as noted

before. These caravans left Makkah loaded with such products as date fruit, harness for horses and camels, blankets made from wool or camel hair; perfumes and aromatic herbs; spices, incense, hides and skins of the desert animals, and pedigreed horses. They brought back with them textiles, olive oil, weapons, coffee, fruits and grain.

Both the League of the Virtuous and the caravan trade were unquestionably great gifts of the Banu Hashim to the Arabs. But their greatest gift, not only to the Arabs, but to the whole world, was going to be the child to be called Muhammad, the son of Abdullah ibn Abdul Muttalib and Amina bint Wahab. He was going to be the greatest benefactor not only of the Arabs but of all mankind. One of the notable events that took place during the incumbency of Abdul Muttalib as the guardian of Kaaba, was the invasion of Makkah by an Abyssinian army led by the Christian general, Abraha. The attempt to capture Makkah failed as reported in the following verses of the Holy Qur'an.

"And He sent against them flights of birds, Striking them with stones of baked clay, Then He made them like an empty field of stalks and straw, all eaten up." (Chapter 105, Verses 3, 4, 5.)

Since the invaders had brought some elephants with them, the year of their campaign came to be known as the "Year of the Elephant". The Year of the Elephant coincides with the year A.D. 570 which also happens to be the year of the birth of Muhammad, the future prophet. The invading army withdrew from Makkah, and the terms of truce were negotiated, on behalf of the city of Makkah, by Abdul Muttalib.

Sir John Glubb

In 570 Abraha, the Christian Abyssinian viceroy of the Yemen marched on Mecca. Quraish were too timid or too weak to oppose the Abyssinian army and Abdul Muttalib, at the head of a deputation, went out to negotiate with Abraha. (The Great Arab Conquests, 1963)

One of the distant cousins of Hashim was one Abd Shams. A certain Umayya who claimed to be his son, was jealous of Abdul Muttalib's ascendancy and prestige. At one time, he made an attempt to grab his power and authority but failed. The failure rankled in his heart. He nursed a hatred against Abdul Muttalib and his children, and passed it

on to his own sons and grandsons who came to be known as the Banu Umayya.

But there was more than mere tribal jealousy in the hostility of the Banu Umayya toward Banu Hashim. The two clans were the antithesis of each other in character and temperament, and in their outlook on and attitude toward life, as the events were soon to reveal when the former led the pack in opposition to Islam.

The Banu Hashim were destined to be the bulwark of Islam. God Himself chose them for this glorious destiny. Ibn Khaldun, the famous historian and sociologist, writes in his Muqaddimah (Prolegomena) that all true prophets must enjoy the support of some powerful group. This support, he says, is necessary, because it serves as a buffer that protects them against their antagonists and gives them a measure of security without which they cannot carry out their Divine mission.

In the case of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, the Banu Hashim constituted the "powerful group" that protected him from the malevolence of the Banu Umayya, provided him security and enabled him to carry out his Divine mission.Abdul Muttalib had ten sons. Four of them became famous in history. They were:

1.Abdullah, the father of Muhammad.
2.Abu Talib, the father of Ali.
3.Hamza, the hero-martyr of the battle of Uhud.
4.Abbas, the forebear of the Abbasi caliphs of Baghdad.

Abdullah and Abu Talib were the children of the same mother whereas the other eight sons of Abdul Muttalib were born of his other wives.

Chapter 5

The Birth of Muhammad and the Early Years of his Life

Abdullah was the favorite son of Abdul Muttalib. When he was seventeen years old, he was married to Amina, a high-born lady of Yathrib, a city in the north of Makkah. He was not, however, destined to live long, and died only seven months after his marriage.

Muhammad, the future apostle of God, was a posthumous child.Shaikh Muhammad el-Khidhri Buck, professor of Islamic History, Egyptian University, Cairo, says in his book, Noor-ulYaqeen fi Seeret Sayyed al-Mursaleen (1953). He (Muhammad ibn Abdullah) was born in the house of his uncle, Abu Talib, in the "quarter" of Banu Hashim in Makkah, on the 12th of Rabi al-Awal of the Year of the Elephant, a date that corresponds to June 8, 570. His midwife was the mother of Abdur Rahman ibn Auf. His mother, Amina, sent the tidings of the auspicious birth to his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, who came, took him in his arms, and gave him the name Muhammad.

Muhammad's share in his patrimony was one maid servant, Umm Ayman; five camels and ten sheep. This is proof that prophets can inherit property, and if they can inherit property from their parents, they can also bequeath property to their own children. Being a prophet does not disqualify them from receiving their own patrimony nor does it disqualify their children from receiving theirs. This statement may appear to be a non-sequitur in this context but it is not. Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, may God bless him and his Ahlul-Bait, had bestowed upon his daughter, Fatima, as a gift, the estate of Fadak. But when he died, Abu Bakr, the khalifa, and Umar, his adviser, seized the estate on the plea that prophets do not bequeath any property to their own children, and whatever wealth they possess, belongs, after their death, not to their

children, but to their umma (the people). It is a grim penalty that one has to pay in Islam for being the son or daughter of its Prophet. Everyone else in the umma has the right to inherit the wealth and property of one's father but not the daughter of Muhammad, the Messenger of God!

It was a custom among the Quraysh to send their children into the desert to spend their early years in a climate that was more salubrious than that of Mach. Children built up stronger bodies in the wide open spaces and pure air of the desert than they could in the stifling and noisome air of the City.

There was one more reason why the Arab aristocrats sent their children to live in the desert. They were purists in speech, and were great "aficionados" of words. They were fascinated by the Arabic language, its words, their meanings and the various nuances of their meaning; and they took great pride in their own eloquence. In fact, the upper classes in Makkah predicated their authority on their rhetorical power. Makkah was the meeting-place of many caravans and its Arabic had become corrupted into a kind of "pidgin Arabic". The Arab aristocrats did not want their children to learn and to speak the pidgin Arabic of Makkah; they wanted them to speak only the pure and uncontaminated language of the desert. They, therefore, sent their children away from Makkah to protect them from all such deleterious effects during the early years of their lives.

Amina gave her child, Muhammad, to Halima, a woman of the tribe of Banu Asad, living in the east of Makkah, for nursing. The infant Muhammad spent the first four years of his life in the desert with his wet-nurse. Sometime in the fifth year of his life, she is reported to have brought him back to his mother in Makkah.

Muhammad was six years old when Amina, his mother, died. He was then taken by Abdul Muttalib, his grandfather, to his home. But only two years had passed when Abdul Muttalib also died.

Just before his death, Abdul Muttalib called all his sons together and told them that he was leaving two "bequests" for them; one was the leadership of the clan of Banu Hashim, and the other was Muhammad ibn Abdullah, their nephew, an orphan of eight. He then asked them who among them wanted his power and authority as the leader of the tribe, and who among them would take charge of the boy who had lost both

parents. Most of his sons showed much eagerness to be named the leader of the tribe but no one volunteered to take charge of Muhammad.

As Abdul-Muttalib surveyed the assembly and contemplated the future of the boy, Muhammad, an uneasy silence fell over the scene. But it didn't last long. Abu Talib, one of his sons, stepped forward and said that he wanted the son of his late brother, Abdullah, and that he had no interest in authority and power.

Abu Talib's forthright declaration clinched the matter for Abdul Muttalib. He decided to make Abu Talib not only the guardian of Muhammad but also the guardian of the clan of Banu Hashim.

Abdul Muttalib announced on his death-bed that his son, Abu Talib, would succeed him as the new chief of Banu Hashim, and that he would also be the guardian of Muhammad. He then ordered the assembly to acknowledge Abu Talib as the new leader of Banu Hashim. The latter complied, and was then dismissed.

History ratified the judgment of Abdul Muttalib. His son and successor, Abu Talib, discharged both duties most honorably.

Sir John Glubb

In 578 Abdul Muttalib died. Before his death, he charged his son, Abu Talib, to look after Muhammad. Abdullah, Muhammad's father, had been the brother of Abu Talib by both their father and mother. Abdul Muttalib's other sons had apparently come from different wives. (The Life and Times of Mohammed, 1970)

Abu Talib and his wife were very happy and proud to receive Muhammad into their family. They took him not into their home but into their hearts, and they loved him more than they loved their own children.

Abu Talib was a man of great dignity and commanding presence. During his incumbency as the leader of Banu Hashim he bore the titles of the "Lord of Quraysh," and "Chief of the Valley." Like other members of his tribe, he was also a merchant, and his caravans traveled to and from Syria and Yemen

In every season, Abu Talib's caravans left Makkah for their various destinations. Occasionally, he himself accompanied a caravan to supervise the sale and purchase of merchandise in the foreign markets. Young Muhammad is reported to have traveled with him to Syria with one of the caravans when he was twelve years old.

Early in life, Muhammad, the future prophet, built up a reputation for truthfulness, integrity and sound judgment. Since there were no banks in those days, he became a "banker" for the Makkans. They brought their cash, jewelry, and other valuables to him for safe-keeping, and whenever they wanted anything back, he returned it to them. They called him Amin (trustworthy) and Sadiq (truthful).

Sir William Muir

Endowed with a refined mind and delicate taste, reserved and meditative, he (Mohammed) lived much within himself, and the pondering of his heart supplied occupation for leisure hours spent by men of a lower stamp in rude sports and profligacy. The fair character and honorable bearings of the unobtrusive youth won the approbation of his fellow-citizens; and he received the title, by common consent, of Al-Amin, ‘the Faithful.' Thus respected and honored, Mohammed lived a quiet and retired life in the family of Abu Talib. (Life of Mohammed, 1877, p. 20)

When Muhammad was twenty years old, a war broke out between Quraysh, his tribe, and the tribe of Hawazin. Though he was present in the campaigns of this war, he did not take any part in fighting. He did not kill or wound anyone, thus showing at this early period, his hatred of bloodshed. He is, however, said to have picked up arrows from the ground, and to have given them to his uncles who were fighting.

A few years later, Muhammad was admitted as a member into the League of the Virtuous. As mentioned earlier, this League had pledged itself to protect the weak, to oppose the tyrants and the oppressors, and to put an end to exploitation in all forms.

It is noteworthy that it was the clan of Banu Hashim, to which Muhammad, the future prophet belonged, which inaugurated the League of the Virtuous. Was it a mere coincidence? There is no way to

answer this question. But by their demarche, the Banu Hashim had declared war upon iniquity and injustice. They made it clear that they would not connive at the crimes of the strong against the weak; nor would they acquiesce in the exploitation of the poor by the Quraysh of Makkah. Not many years later, Muhammad was to launch a program for the reconstruction of human society the economic component of which would comprehend precisely the destruction of exploitation. He would take the "privileges" of the Quraysh, and their "right" to exploit the poor and the weak, away from them.

Montgomery Watt

The League of the Virtuous seems to have played an important part in the life of Mecca, and in large part to have been directed against the men and the policies to which Mohammed later found himself opposed. In particular his clan of Hashim came to have a leading role in the League of the Virtuous. (Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman, 1961)

Chapter 6

The Marriage of Muhammad Mustafa and Khadija

Khadija, the daughter of Khuwaylid, was a resident of Makkah. She also belonged to the tribe of Quraysh. She was held in high esteem by the Makkans because of her exemplary character and her organizing ability. Just as the Makkans called Muhammad ‘Sadiq' and ‘Ameen,' they called Khadija Tahira, which means "the pure one." She was also known among the Arabs as the ‘Princess of the Merchants.' Whenever the caravans left Makkah or returned to Makkah, they noted that her cargo was larger in volume than the cargo of all other merchants of Makkah put together.

When Muhammad was 25 years old, his uncle and guardian, Abu Talib, suggested to Khadija, with his tacit understanding, that she appoint him as her agent in one of her caravans, which was ready to leave for Syria just then. Khadija was in fact in need of an agent at that very moment. She agreed andappointed Muhammad as her agent. He took charge of her merchandise, and the caravan set out for Syria. Her slave, Maysara, also accompanied him and served him as an aide.

This commercial expedition to Syria was successful beyond expectations, and Khadija was so impressed by her agent's ability and integrity that she decided to put him in charge of all her future business transactions. The expedition also proved to be the prelude of their marriage.

Edward Gibbon

At home and abroad, in peace and war, Abu Talib, the most respected of Mohammed's uncles, was the guide and guardian of his youth; in his 25th year he entered into the service of Khadija, rich and noble widow of Mecca, who soon rewarded his fidelity with the gift of her hand and fortune. The marriage contract, in the simple style of antiquity, recites the

mutual love of Mohammed and Khadija; describes him as the most accomplished of the tribe of Koreish; and stipulates a dowry of twelve ounces of gold and twenty camels, which was supplied by the liberality of his uncle. (Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

Abu Talib read the khutba (sermon) of the marriage of Muhammad and Khadija, and his speech proves beyond any doubt that he was a monotheist. He began the speech in the "Muslim" style by offering thanks and praise to Allah for His mercy and for His countless gifts and blessings; and he concluded by invoking His mercy and blessings upon the newly-weds.

The marriage of Muhammad and Khadija was most successful. It was blessed with felicity unlimited for both husband and wife. Khadija dedicated her life to the service of her husband and of Islam. She spent all her vast wealth in strengthening Islam, and on the welfare of the Muslims.

Khadija had the same sense of mission as Muhammad had, and she was just as eageras he was to see Islam triumph over paganism. To her eagerness to see the triumph of Islam, she added commitment and power. She freed her husband from the necessity of making a living, and thus enabled him to devote all his time to reflection and contemplation in preparation for the great work which lay ahead of him. This is a most significant contribution she made to the work of her husband as messenger of God. She was the fulcrum that he needed in all the years of preparation for the prophethood.

The marriage of Muhammad and Khadija was also blessed by the birth of their daughter, Fatima Zahra. Though the gifts which God bestowed upon them, were many, there was none that they treasured more than their daughter, Fatima Zahra. She was the "light of the eyes" of her father, and the future "Lady of Heaven." The father and mother lavished their love on her, and she brought hope and happiness and the mercy and blessings of God with her into their home.

Chapter 7

The birth of Ali ibn Abi Talib

Ali was born on the 13th of Rajab of the 30th year of the Elephant (A.D. 600). His cousin, Muhammad, was now 30 years old. Ali's parents were Abu Talib ibn Abdul Muttalib, and Fatima, the daughter of Asad, both of the clan of Hashim.

Ali was born inside the Kaaba in Makkah. The great historian, Masoodi, the Herodotus of the Arabs, writes on page 76 of Volume II of his book, Murooj-udh-Dhahab (The Golden Meadows), that one of the greatest distinctions that Ali enjoyed was that he was born in the House of Allah.Some of the other authorities who have affirmed Ali's birth in the Kaaba, are:

1.Muhammad ibn Talha el-Shafei in Matalib-us-saool, page 11.
2.Hakim in Mustadrak, page 483, Vol. III.
3.El-Umari in Sharh Ainia, page 15.
4.Halabi in Sira, page 165, Vol. I.
5.Sibt ibn al-Jauzi in Tadhkera Khawasil Ummah, page 7.
6.Ibn Sabbagh Maleki in Fusoolul Mohimma, page 14.
7.Muhammad bin Yousuf Shafei in Kifayet al-Talib, page 261.
8.Shablanji in Nurul Absar, page 76.
9.Ibn Zahra in Ghiyathul Ikhtisar, page 97.
10. Edvi in Nafhatul Qudsia, page 41.

Among the modern historians, Abbas Mahmood al-Akkad of Egypt writes in his book Al-'Abqarriyet al-Imam Ali, (Cairo, 1970), that Ali ibn Abi Talib was born inside the Kaaba.

Another contemporary historian, Mahmood Saeed al-Tantawi, of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, Arab Republic of Egypt, writes on

page 186 of his book, Min Fada-il al-'Ashrat al-Mubashireen bil Janna, published in 1976 by Matab'a al-Ahram at-Tijariyya, Cairo, Egypt:

"May God have mercy upon Ali ibn Abi Talib. He was born in the Kaaba. He witnessed the rise of Islam; he witnessed the Da'wa of Muhammad, and he was a witness of the Wahi (Revelation of Al-Qur'an al-Majid). He immediately accepted Islam even though he was still a child, and he fought all his life so that the Word of Allah would be supreme."

An Arab poet composed the following distich on the birth of Ali:

He (Ali) is the one for whom the House of Allah was turned into a maternity home; And he is the one who threw the idols out of that House; Ali was the first and the last child ever to be born in the Kaaba.

It was a custom of the Arabs that when a child was born, he was placed at the feet of the tribal idol or idols, thus symbolically "dedicating" him to the pagan deity. All Arab children were "dedicated" to the idols except Ali ibn Abi Talib. When other Arab children were born, some idolater came to greet them and to take them in his arms. But when Ali was born, Muhammad, the future Messenger of God, came into the precincts of the Kaaba to greet him. He took the infant into his arms,, and dedicated him to the service of Allah. The future prophet must have known that the infant in his arms was some day going to be the nemesis of all idolaters and polytheists and of their gods and goddesses. When Ali grew up, he extirpated idolatry and polytheism from Arabia with his sword.

Birth in Kaaba was one out of many distinctions that God bestowed upon Ali. Another distinction that he enjoyed was that he never adored the idols. This again makes him unique since all Arabs worshipped idols for years and years before they abjured idolatry and accepted Islam. It is for this reason that he is called "he whose face was honored by Allah." His face was indeed honored by Allah as it was the only face that never bowed before any idol.

Ali was the youngest child in the family. Of the three of his brothers, Talib and Aqeel, were many years older than him; Jaafer was ten years older.

The birth of Ali filled the heart of the future Apostle with boundless happiness. The child was someone "special" for him. After all, Muhammad had many other cousins and they had their own children, and Ali himself had three elder brothers; but he didn't show any interest in any of them. Ali and Ali alone was the focus of his interest and love.

When Ali was five years old, Muhammad adopted him, and from that moment they were never to part with each other.

There is a story that once there was a famine in Makkah, and the surrounding areas, and Abu Talib, being in dire straits at the time, was finding it difficult to support a large establishment. It occurred to Muhammad that he ought to try to mitigate some of his uncle's burden of responsibilities, and was thus prompted to adopt Ali.

It is true that Muhammad adopted Ali but not for the reason stated above. In the first place, Abu Talib was not in such dire straits that he could not feed a child of five; he was a man of rank and substance, and his caravans plied between Hijaz and Syria or between Hijaz and Yemen. In the second place, feeding a child of five years would have hardly made any difference to a man who fed even strangers if they were hungry.

Muhammad and Khadija adopted Ali after the death of their own sons. Ali thus filled a void in their lives. But Muhammad, the future prophet, also had another reason for adopting Ali. He picked out Ali to bring him up, to educate him, and to groom him for the great destiny that awaited him in the times to come. Dr. Taha Hussain of Egypt says that the Messenger of God himself became Ali's guide, teacher and instructor, and this is one more distinction that he enjoys, and which no one else shares with him (Ali).

About Islam it has been said that of all the universal religions, it is the only one which has grown in the full light of history, and there is no part of its story which is in obscurity.

Bernard Lewis

In an essay on Muhammad and the origin of Islam, Ernest Renan remarks that, unlike other religions which were cradled in mystery, Islam was born in the full light of history. "Its roots are at surface level, the life of its founder is as well known to us as those of the Reformers of the sixteenth century". (The Arabs in History, 1960,)

G. E. Von Grunebaum

Islam presents the spectacle of the development of a world religion in the full light of history. (Islam, 1969)

Similarly, it may be said that of all the friends and companions of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, Ali is the only one who grew up in the full light of history. There is no part of his life, whether it is his infancy, childhood, boyhood, youth, manhood, or maturity, that is hidden from the spotlight of history. He was the cynosure of all eyes from his birth to his death. On the other hand, the rest of the companions of the Prophet come to the attention of the student of history only after they accept Islam, and little, if anything, is known about them until then.

Ali was destined to become the right arm of Islam, and the shield and buckler of Muhammad, the Messenger of God. His destiny was inseparably linked with the destiny of Islam, and the life of its Prophet. He was present at every juncture in the history of the new movement, and he played the stellar role in it. It was, incidentally, a role that he alone could have played. He reflected the "image" of Muhammad. The Book of God itself called him the "soul" or the alter ego (a second self) of Muhammad in verse 61 of its third chapter, and paraded his illustrious name across the horizons of history.

In the years to come, the creative synergy of Muhammad and Ali – the master and the disciple – was going to place the "Kingdom of Heaven" on the map of the world.

Chapter 8

On the Eve of the Proclamation of His Mission

Not with standing the fact that Arabia was a pit of iniquity and the bastion of idolatry and polytheism, Muhammad himself was never contaminated by any vice or sin, and he never bowed before any idol. Even before he formally declared that he came to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, his own conduct and character were a reflection of Qur'an –the glorious. Even his critics have not been able to point out any divergence between his conduct and the precepts of Qur'an at any time, before or after the Proclamation. After the Proclamation of his mission as the Messenger of God, he placed pagan practices and customs under proscription, but there is no evidence that before doing so, he himself ever committed a pagan act, or indeed any act repugnant to Qur'an.

It appears that Qur'an, the Book of God, was etched on the heart of Muhammad from the beginning, and it also appears that he "preached" Islam even before the Proclamation but only through his deeds and not with words. His deeds were just as eloquent as his speeches, and they proclaimed to the world what manner of man he was. After all, it were the pagans who called him Amin (the trusted one) and Sadiq (the truthful), and they were the same people who, in later years, persecuted him, hunted him, Banushed him, and set a price on his head.

Depraved and wanton as the pagan Arabs were, they admired truthfulness, even in an enemy. Yet their admiration for Muhammad's truthfulness did not inhibit them from seeking his destruction when he denounced their idolatry and polytheism. They thirsted for his blood ever since he invited them to Islam but never questioned his trustworthiness. On this point there cannot be a testimony more unimpeachable than theirs.

The citizens of Makkah admired not only Muhammad's integrity but also his judgment. At one time, the Quraysh were rebuilding the Kaaba, and in one of the walls they had to fit the Black Stone. Someone had to bring the Black Stone to the site of construction, lift it from the ground, and put it in its place in the wall. Who was going to do it?

Each clan claimed the honor for itself but the other clans were not willing to yield to anyone in this matter. The disagreement led to violent speeches, and hotheads threatened to decide with the sword who would place the Black Stone in its place in the wall.

At that moment, an old Arab intervened, and suggested that instead of fighting against and killing each other, the chiefs of the clans ought to wait and see who would be the first man to enter the precincts of the Kaaba on the following morning, and then submit the case for adjudication to him.

It was a wise suggestion, and the chiefs wisely accepted it. Next morning when the gate of Kaaba was opened, they saw Muhammad entering through it. They were all glad that it was he, and they all agreed to refer their dispute to him, and to abide by his decision.

Muhammad ordered a sheet of cloth to be brought, and to be spread on the ground. He then placed the Stone on it, and he asked each chief to lift one of its corners and to carry it to the foot of the wall of Kaaba. When it was done, he himself lifted the Stone and placed it in position.

Muhammad's decision satisfied everyone. By his wisdom, he had saved faces and he had obviated bloodshed. The incident also proved that in moments of crisis, the Arabs deferred to his opinion. He was a charismatic leader of men.

Chapter 9

The Birth of Islam and the Proclamation by Muhammad of his Mission

When Muhammad was 40 years old, he was commanded by God, through His angel, Gabriel, to declare His Oneness to the idolaters and polytheists of the whole world, and to deliver the message of peace to an embattled humanity. In response to this command of Heaven, Muhammad launched the momentous program called Islam which was to change the destiny of mankind forever.

Before the Call came to him to declare the Unity of the Creator, Muhammad was in the habit of spending much time in meditation and reflection. To be free from interference and extraneous distractions, he frequently went to a mountain cave called Hira, three miles in the north-east of Makkah, and spent the long summer days there. He was in Hira when one day the Archangel Gabriel appeared before him, and brought to him the tidings that God had chosen him to be His Last Messenger to this world, and had imposed upon him the duty of leading mankind out of the welter of sin, error and ignorance into the light of Guidance, Truth and Knowledge. Gabriel then bade Muhammad to "read" the following verses:

"Read in the name of thy lord and cherisher who created: Created man out of a clot of congealed blood. Read!And thy lord is most bountiful, He who taught the use of pen; Taught man that which he knew not".

These five verses were the earliest revelation, and they came to Muhammad on the "Night of Power" or the "Blessed Night" in the month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar) of the 40th year of the Elephant. They are at the beginning of the 96th chapter of Al-Qur'an

al-Majid. The name of the chapter is Iqraa (Read) or 'Alaq (the Clot of Congealed Blood).

The Night of Power or the Blessed Night occurs, according to tradition, during the last ten days of the month of Ramadan, and could be the 21st or 23rd or 25th or 27th of the month.

In their respective accounts of the reception by Muhammad of the First Revelation, the Sunni and the Shia Muslims are not in agreement. According to the Sunni tradition, the appearance of Gabriel surprised Muhammad, and when the former ordered him to read, he said, "I cannot read." This happened thrice, and each time when Muhammad declared his inability to read, the angel pressed him hard to his bosom. Eventually, he was able to repeat the five verses whereupon the angel released him and disappeared

When Archangel Gabriel disappeared, Muhammad, who was now "ordained" the Messenger of Allah, descended from the cliffs of Hira, and repaired to his home in a state of great trepidation. He was shivering with cold, and when he entered his house, he asked his wife, Khadija, to cover him with a blanket which she did. When he had sufficiently recovered from the shock, he recounted to her the story of his strange encounter with Archangel Gabriel in the cave of Hira.

The traditional Sunni account of this incident is given in an article written by Shaykh Ahmad Zaki Hammad, Ph.D., captioned Be Hopeful, published in the monthly magazine, Islamic Horizons, of the Islamic Society of North America, Plainfield, Indiana, May-June 1987, as follows:

"The Prophet (pbuh) in the early stages in Makkah, feared that the revelation experience was an evil touch preying upon him, playing with him mentally, upsetting his tranquillity and peace of mind. He was afraid that one of the jinn had touched him. He expressed this to Khadija. His fear increased to the point that – and please don't be surprised by an authentic report in Bukhari – the Prophet (pbuh) preferred to take his own life rather than to be touched by evil, to be tampered with, corrupted, or polluted."

But according to the accounts of the Shia Muslims, Muhammad Mustafa, far from being surprised or frightened by the appearance of

Gabriel, welcomed him as if he had been expecting him. Gabriel brought the tidings that Allah had chosen him to be His Last Messenger to Mankind, and congratulated him on being selected to become the recipient of the greatest of all honors for a mortal in this world.

Muhammad had no hesitation in accepting the mission of prophethood nor he had any difficulty in repeating the verses of the First Revelation. He read them or repeated them effortlessly, spontaneously. Gabriel, in fact, was no stranger to him, and he also knew that his own raison d'être was to carry out the mission imposed upon him by God as His Messenger. He was "mission-oriented"even before Gabriel's visit. Gabriel only gave him the signal to begin.

The Shia Muslims also say that one thing that Gabriel didn't have to do, was to apply physical pressure on Muhammad to read. If he did, it would truly be a bizarre mode of imparting to Muhammad the ability to read – by squeezing him or choking him. They further maintain that Muhammad Mustafa did not contemplate suicide at any time in his life, not even in its most desolate moments; and that it never occurred to him that he could ever be touched by "evil" or that he could be "corrupted" or "polluted."

Nevertheless, Muhammad felt alarm at the magnitude of the task ahead of him. He realized that in the execution of his duty, he would be confronted by the massive, formidable and determined opposition of the pagans of the whole world. The state of his anxiety was almost palpable. He was, therefore, in a somber frame of mind as he left the cave to return home. And he did ask Khadija to drape him in a blanket as he sat down to recapitulate the events in Hira to her.

When Khadija heard the story that Muhammad told her, she comforted him and reassured him by saying: "O son of my uncle, be of good cheer. Allah has chosen you to be His messenger. You are always kind to your neighbors, helpful to your kinsfolk, generous to the orphans, the widows and the poor, and friendly to the strangers. Allah will never forsake you."

It is possible that Muhammad was momentarily overweighedby the thought of his accountability to Allah in carrying the enormous burden of his new responsibilities, but when he heard Khadija's soothing words,

he immediately felt the tensions within him decompressing. She reassured him and convinced him that with God's Hand on his shoulder, he would rise equal to his duties and would overcome all obstacles.

After a brief interval, Gabriel appeared once again before Muhammad when the latter was in the cave of Hira, and presented to him the second Revelation which reads as follows:

O Thou wrapped up (in a mantle)! Arise and deliver thy warning! And thy lord do thou magnify. (Chapter 74; verses 1,2,3)

The commandment from Heaven to "arise and warn" was the signal to Muhammad (the wrapped up in a blanket) to begin his work. Gabriel expounded to him his new duties the foremost of which was to destroy the worship of false gods, and to plant the banner of Tauheed – the doctrine of the Unity of the Creator – in the world; and he had to invite mankind to the True Faith – Islam. Islam means to surrender to Allah, and to acknowledgeMuhammad as His slave and His messenger.

That evening Muhammad returned home conscious and conscientious of his new duty that he had to preach Islam, and that he had to begin from his own home – by preaching it to his wife.

Muhammad told Khadija about the second visit of Gabriel, and the duty imposed upon him by Allah to invite her to Islam. For Khadija, the antecedents and the moral integrity of her husband were an incontrovertible attestation that he was a divine messenger, and she readily accepted Islam. In fact, between her and Islam, an "ideological affinity" had pre-existed. Therefore, when Muhammad Mustafa presented Islam to her, she at once "recognized" it, and rosily embraced it. She believed that the Creator was One, and that Muhammad was His messenger, and she declared:

I bear witness that there is no god but Allah; and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and His Messenger.

Muhammad, the new messenger of God, had won his first convert - Khadija – his wife. She was the first one, the very first to affirm her faith in Tauheed (Oneness of the Creator), and she was the very first to

acknowledge Muhammad as God's messenger to all mankind. She was the first Muslima.

Muhammad "introduced" Islam to Khadija. He explained to her its meaning, and he initiated her into it.

The honor to be the first individual in the whole world to bear witness to God's unity and to acknowledge Muhammad's prophethood, belongs to Khadija for all time.

F. E. Peters

She (Khadija) was the first to accept the truth of his (Muhammad's) revelation, the premier Muslim after the Prophet himself. She encouraged and supported Muhammad during the first difficult years of his public preaching, and during the twenty-five years of their marriage he took no other wife. Theirs was, by any reasonable standard of judgment, a love match as well as a corporate partnership. (Allah's Commonwealth, New York)

As noted before, Ali ibn Abi Talib, was living at this time with his foster-parents, Muhammad and Khadija. The two sons of Muhammad and Khadija – Qasim and Abdullah had died in their infancy. After their death, they had adopted Ali as their son. Ali was five years old when he came into their house, and he was ten years old when Muhammad was ordained messenger of God. Muhammad and Khadija brought him up and educated him. In the years to come, he showed himself a most splendid "product" of the upbringing and education that Muhammad and Khadija gave him.

Sir William Muir

Shortly after the rebuilding of the Kaaba, Mohammed comforted himself for the loss of his infant son Casim by adopting Ali, the child of his friend and former guardian, Abu Talib. Ali, at this time not above five or six years of age, remained ever after with Mohammed, and they exhibited towards each other the mutual attachment of parent and child. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

Since Ali was a member of the Prophet's own family, he was inevitably the first, among males, to receive the message of Islam. He testified that God was One, and that Muhammad was His messenger. And he was very eager to stand behind Muhammad Mustafa to offer prayers. Since then Muhammad was never seen at prayer except when Ali was with him. The boy also memorized the verses of Al-Qur'an al-Majid as and when they were revealed to Muhammad. In this manner, he literally grew up with Qur'an. In fact, Ali and Qur'an "grew up" together as "twins" in the house of Muhammad Mustafa and Khadija-tul-Kubra. Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah, had found the first Muslima in Khadija, and the first Muslim in Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

Ali was the first male to believe in the Apostle of God, to pray with him and to believe in his divine message, when he was a boy of ten. God favored him in that he was brought up in the care of the Apostle before Islam began. (The Life of the Messenger of God)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Ali was then the first youth to enter Islam. He was followed by Zayd ibn Harithah, Muhammad's client. Islam remained confined to the four walls of one house. Besides Muhammad himself, the converts of the new faith were his wife, his cousin, and his client. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Marmaduke Pickhtall

The first of all his (Muhammad's) converts was his wife, Khadija; the second his first cousin Ali, whom he had adopted; the third his servant Zeyd, a former slave. (Introduction to the Translation of Holy Qur'an, Lahore, Pakistan, 1975)

The third "witness" who accepted Islam, was Zayd ibn Haritha, the freedman of Muhammad, and a member of his household.

Tor Andre

Zaid was one of the first to accept Islam, in fact the third, after Khadija and Ali. (Mohammed, the Man and his Faith, 1960)

Ali ibn Abi Talib was the first male to accept Islam, and his precedence is beyond any question. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of Indo-Pakistan, calls him, not the first, but "the foremost Muslim."

Ibn Ishaq

From Yahya b. al-Ash'ath b. Qays al-Kindi from his father, from his grandfather Afiif: Al-Abbas b. Abdul Muttalib was a friend of mine who used to go often to the Yaman to buy aromatics and sell them during the fairs. While I was with him in Mina, there came a man in the prime of life and performed the full rites of ablution and then stood up and prayed. Then a woman came out and did her ablution and stood up and prayed. Then out came a youth just approaching manhood, did his ablutions, then stood up and prayed by his side. When I asked Al-Abbas what was going on, and he said that it was his nephew Muhammad b. Abdullah b. Abdul Muttalib, who alleges that Allah has sent him as an Apostle; the other is my brother's son, Ali ibn Abi Talib, who has followed him in his religion; the third is his wife, Khadija daughter of Khuwaylid who also follows him in his religion. Afiif said after he had become a Muslim and Islam firmly established in his heart, 'Would that I had been a fourth.!' (The Life of the Messenger of God)

The fourth witness who accepted Islam, was Abu Bakr, a merchant of Makkah. In the beginning, Muhammad preached Islam secretly for fear of arousing the hostility of the idolaters. He invited only those people to Islam who were known to him personally. It is said that through the efforts of Abu Bakr, the fourth Muslim, a few other Makkans also accepted Islam. Among them were Uthman bin Affan, a futurekhalifa of the Muslims; Talha, Zubayr, Abdur Rahman bin Auf, Saad bin Abi Waqqas, and Obaidullah ibn al-Jarrah.

For a long time the Muslims were very few in number and they did not dare to say their prayers in public. One of the early converts to Islam was Arqam bin Abi al-Arqam, a young man of the clan of Makhzoom. He was well-to-do and lived in a spacious house in the valley of Safa. Muslims gathered in his house to offer their congregational prayers.

Three years passed in this manner. Then in the fourth year, Muhammad was commanded by God to invite his own folks to Islam openly.

And admonish thy nearest kinsmen. (Chapter 26; verse 214)

Muhammad's folks included all members of Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib. He ordered his young cousin, Ali, to invite all their chief men to a banquet – forty of them.

When all the guests had gathered in a hall in the house of Abu Talib, and had partaken of their repast, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, rose to address them. One of the guests was Abu Lahab, an uncle of the Prophet on his father's side. He must have heard rumors of what his nephew was doing in Makkah secretly, and probably guessed the reason why he had invited Banu Hashim to a feast. The Prophet had just begun to speak when he stood up; rudely interrupted him, and himself addressed the assembly, saying:

"Uncles, brothers and cousins! Do not listen to this "renegade," and do not abandon your ancestral religion if he invites you to adopt a new one. If you do, then remember that you will rouse the anger of all Arabs against you. You do not have the strength to fight against all of them. After all, we are a mere handful. Therefore, it is in your own interest to be steadfast in your traditional religion."

Abu Lahab, by his speech, succeeded in throwing confusion and disorder into the meeting so that everyone stood up milling around and jostling against each other. Then they began to leave, and soon the hall was empty.

Muhammad's first attempt to convert his own tribe to Islam had failed. But unfazed by this initial setback, he ordered his cousin, Ali, to invite the same guests a second time.

A few days later the guests came, and when they had eaten supper, Muhammad rose and spoke to them as follows:

"I offerthanks to Allah for His mercies. I praise Allah, and I seek His guidance. I believe in Him and I put my trust in Him. I bear witness that there is no god except Allah; He has no partners; and I am His

messenger. Allah has commanded me to invite you to His religion by saying: And warn thy nearest kinsfolk. I, therefore, warn you, and call upon you to testify that there is no god but Allah, and that I am His messenger. O ye sons of Abdul Muttalib, no one ever came to you before with anything better than what I have brought to you. By accepting it, your welfare will be assured in this world and in the Hereafter. Who among you will support me in carrying out this momentous duty? Who will share the burden of this work with me? Who will respond to my call? Who will become my vicegerent, my deputy and my wazir?"

There were forty guests in the hall. Muhammad paused to let the effect of his words sink into their minds but no one among them responded. At last when the silence became too oppressive, young Ali stood up and said that he would support the Messenger of God; would share the burden of his work; and would become his vicegerent, his deputy and his wazir. But Muhammad beckoned him to sit down, and said: "Wait! Perhaps someone older than you might respond to my call."

Muhammad renewed his invitation but still no one seemed to stir, and he was greeted only by an uneasy silence. Once again, Ali offered his services but the Apostle still wishing that some senior member of the clan would accept his invitation, asked him to wait. He then appealed to the clan a third time to consider his invitation, and the same thing happened again. No one in the assembly showed any interest. He surveyed the crowd and transfixed everyone in it with his gaze but no one moved. At length he beheld the solitary figure of Ali rising above the assembly of silent men, to volunteer his services to him.

This time Mohammed accepted Ali's offer. He drew him close, pressed him to his heart, and said to the assembly: "This is my wazir, my successor and my vicegerent. Listen to him and obey his commands."

Edward Gibbon

Three years were silently employed in the conversion of fourteen proselytes, the first fruits of his (Mohammed's) mission; but in the fourth year he assumed the prophetic office, and resolving to impart to his family the light of divine truth, he prepared a banquet for the entertainment of forty guests of the race of Hashim. ‘Friends and kinsmen,' Mohammed said to the assembly, ‘I offer you, and I alone can offer, the most precious

gifts, the treasures of this world and of the world to come. God has commanded me to call you to His service. Who among you will support my burden? Who among you will be my companion and my vizir? No answer was returned, till the silence of astonishment and doubt, and contempt was at length broken by the impatient courage of Ali, a youth in the fourteenth year of his age. ‘O Prophet,' he said, ‘I am the man. Whosoever rises against thee, I will dash out his teeth, tear out his eyes, break his legs, rip up his belly. O Prophet, I will be thy vizir over them.' Mohammed accepted his offer with transport, and Abu Talib was ironically exhorted to respect the superior dignity of his son. (Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

Washington Irving

‘O children of Abd al-Muttalib,' cried he (Mohammed) with enthusiasm, ‘to you, of all men, has Allah vouchsafed these most precious gifts. In his name I offer you the blessings of this world, and endless joys hereafter. Who among you will share the burden of my offer? Who will be my brother, my lieutenant, my vizir?' All remained silent; some wondering; others smiling with incredulity and derision. At length Ali, starting up with youthful zeal, offered himself to the service of the Prophet though modestly acknowledging his youth and physical weakness. Mohammed threw up his arms around the generous youth, and pressed him to his bosom. 'Behold my brother, my vizir, my vicegerent,' exclaimed he, "Let all listen to his words, and obey him." (The Life of Mohammed)

Sir Richard Burton

After a long course of meditation, fired with anger by the absurd fanaticism of the Jews, the superstitions of the Syrian and Arab Christians, and the horrid idolatries of his unbelieving countrymen, an enthusiast too – and what great soul has not been an enthusiast? – he (Mohammed) determined to reform those abuses which rendered revelation contemptible to the learned and prejudicial to the vulgar. He introduced himself as one inspired to a body of his relations and fellow-clansmen. The step was a failure, except that it won for him a proselyte worth a thousand sabers in the person of Ali, son of Abu Talib. (The Jew the Gypsy and El Islam, San Francisco, 1898)

Ali had offered his services to Muhammad, the Messenger of God, and the latter had accepted them. To the elders of the tribe, Ali's conduct might have appeared rash and brazen but he soon proved that he had the grit to accomplish far more than others had the courage even to dream. The Messenger of God, on his part, accepted the offer not only with expressions of gratitude and joy but also declared that Ali was, from that moment, his vicegerent. Muhammad's declaration was forthright and unequivocal. It is foolish to quibble, as some people do, that Ali's vicegerency of Muhammad, was confined to the tribe of Banu Hashim. But Muhammad himself did not restrict Ali's vicegerency to Banu Hashim. Ali was his vicegerent for all Muslims and for all time.

The banquet at which Muhammad, the Messenger of God, declared Ali to be his successor, is famous in history as "the banquet of Dhul-'Asheera." This name comes from Al-Qur'an al-Majid itself (chapter 26; verse 214). Strangely, Sir William Muir has called this historic event "apocryphal." But what is "apocryphal" or so improbable about it? Could anything be more logical for the Messenger of God than to begin his work of propagating Islam at his own home, and with members of his own family and his own clan, especially after being expressly commanded by God towarn his nearest kinsmen?

The feast of Dhul-'Asheera at which Muhammad, the Apostle of God, designated Ali ibn Abi Talib, as his successor, is a historical event, and its authenticity has been affirmed, among others, by the following Arab historians:

1. Tabari, History, Vol. II,p. 217
2. Kamil ibn Atheer, History, Vol. II, p. 22
3. Abul Fida,History, Vol. I, p. 116

Sir William Muir

His (Mohammed's) cousin, Ali, now 13 or 14 years of age, already gave tokens of the wisdom and judgment which distinguished him in after life. Though possessed of indomitable courage, he lacked the stirring energy which would have rendered him an effective propagator of Islam. He grew up from a child in the faith of Mohammed, and his earliest associations strengthened the convictions of maturer years. (The life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

We have many reservations about Sir William Muir's statement that Ali "lacked the stirring energy that would have made him an effective propagator of Islam." Ali did not lack energy or anything else. In all the crises of Islam, he was selected to carry out the most dangerous missions, and he invariably accomplished them.

As a missionary also, Ali was peerless. There was no one among all the companions of the Prophet who was a more effective propagator of Islam than he. He promulgated the first 40 verses of the Surah Bara'a (Immunity), the Ninth chapter of Al-Qur'an al-Majid, to the pagans at Makkah, as the first missionary of Islam, and as one representing the Apostle of God himself. And it was Ali who brought all the tribes of Yemen into the fold of Islam.

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, had brought up Ali as his own child, and if the latter had lacked anything, he would have known it. He declared Ali to be his wazir, his successor and his vicegerent at a time when no one could have foreseen the future of Islam. This only points up the unbounded confidence that the Prophet of Islam had in this stripling of fourteen years.

Ali symbolized the hopes and aspirations of Islam. In the great revolution which Muhammad, the Apostle of God, had launched at the feast of Dhul-'Asheera, he had mobilized the dynamism, and idealism, and the fervor and vigor of youth; Ali personified them all.

Two things had happened at the Feast. One was that the Prophet had brought Islam out in the open. Islam was no longer an "under-ground" movement; it had "surfaced." At the feast of his kinsfolk, Muhammad had "crossed the Rubicon" and now there could be no turning back. Time had come for him to carry the message of Islam beyond his own clan, first to the Quraysh of Makkah, then to all the Arabs, and finally, to the rest of the world. The other was that he had found Ali who was the embodiment of courage, devotion and resolution, and was worth far more than a thousand sabers.

It is reported that some days after the second banquet of Dhul-'Asheera, Muhammad climbed up the hill of Safa near Kaaba, and called out: "O sons of Fehr, O sons of Loi, O sons of Adi, and all the rest of

Quraysh! Come hither, and listen to me. I have something very important to tell you."

Many of those Makkans who heard his voice, came to listen to him. Addressing them, he said: "Will you believe me if I were to tell you that an army was hidden behind yonder hills, and was watching you to attack you as soon as it found you off-guard?" They said they would believe him because they had never heard him tell a lie.

"If that's so," said Muhammad, "then listen to this with attention. The Lord of the Heavens and earth has commanded me to warn you of the dreadful time that is coming. But if you pay heed, you can save yourselves from perdition… " He had gone only as far as this when Abu Lahab, who was present among the listeners, interrupted him again by saying: "Death to you. Did you waste our time to tell us only this? We do not want to hear you. Do not call us again."

Thence forth Abu Lahab made it a practice to shadow the Prophet wherever the latter went. If he started to read the Qur'an or to say something else, he (Abu Lahab) interrupted him or started heckling him. Abu Lahab's hatred of Muhammad and Islam was shared by his wife, Umm Jameel. Both of them were the recipients of the curse of God in Al-Qur'an al-Majid (chapter 111).

Chapter 10

Early Converts to Islam and their Persecution

Though Abu Lahab frequently succeeded in dispersing the crowds that gathered to hear the Apostle's homilies, word nevertheless spread in Makkah about them. Some people talked about the message of Islam. The thoughtful ones among them posed the question: "What is this religion to which Muhammad is inviting us?" This question showed curiosity on their part regarding the message of Islam, and a few among them wanted to know more about it.

In the days that followed, Muhammad made numerous attempts to preach to the Makkans. Abu Lahab and his confederate, Abu Jahl, did what they could to sabotage his work but they could never deflect him from his aim.

Muhammad, may God bless him and his Ahlul-Bait, realized that his work was not going to be easy. He knew that he would encounter many obstacles, and that he would have to contend with fierce and sustained opposition of the idolaters. But he counted upon God's mercy to enable him to overcome opposition.

It was a strange message that Muhammad brought to the Arabs, and it was unique. No one had ever heard anything like it before. Muhammad, the Messenger of God, told the Arabs not to worship the multitudes of inanimate objects made of stone or wood which they themselves had fashioned, and which had no power either to give anything to them or to take anything away from them. Instead, he told them, they ought to give their obedience to Allah, the One Lord of the whole universe. He also told them that in His sight, in the sight of their Creator, they were all equal, and if they became Muslim, they would all become brothers of each other.

Muhammad also wished to reorganize Arab society. The new doctrine that he put forward for this purpose, made Faith instead of Blood, the "linchpin" of the community. But the Arabs were bred in the code of pagan custom and convention; they believed in the basic tribal and kinship structures. For them "Blood" was the only basis of social organization. In their perception, if Faith were allowed to supplant Blood in this equation, it would wreck the whole structure of the Arab society.

Muhammad also called upon the rich Arabs to share their wealth with the poor and the under-privileged. The poor, he said, had a right to receive their share out of the wealth of the rich. Such sharing, he further said, would guarantee the equitable distribution of wealth in the community.

Many of the rich Arabs were money-lenders; or rather, they were "loan sharks." They had grown rich by lending money to the poor classes at exorbitant rates of interest. The poor could never repay their debts, and were thus held in economic servitude in perpetuity. Sharing their ill-gotten wealth with the same people they had been exploiting, was for them, tantamount to a "sacrilege." By suggesting to them that they share their wealth with the poor, Muhammad had tampered with a hornets' nest!

For the Arabs, all these were new and unfamiliar ideas; in fact they were revolutionary. By preaching such revolutionary ideas, Muhammad had infuriated the old establishment. Most furious amongst them was the Umayyad clan of the Quraysh. Its members were the leading usurers and capitalists of Makkah, and they were the high priests of the pagan pantheon. In Muhammad and the message of Islam, they saw a threat to their social system which was based upon privilege and force. They, therefore, resolved to maintain the status quo. In the years to come, they were to form the spearhead of an implacable war against Islam, and of die-hard opposition to Muhammad.

But there were also a few individuals who found a strong appeal in the new ideas which Muhammad was introducing, collectively called Islam. In fact, they found them so irresistible, that they accepted them.

Among the earliest converts to Islam were Yasir; his wife, Sumayya; and their son, Ammar. They were the first family all members of which accepted Islam simultaneously, thus making up the First Muslim Family.

Islam held special appeal for the depressed classes in Makkah. When members of these classes became Muslim, they also became aware that as pagans they were despised and rejected by the highly class-conscious and race-conscious aristocracy of Makkah but Islam gave them a new self-esteem. As Muslims they found a new pride in themselves

Most of the early converts to Islam were "poor and weak." But there were a few rich Muslims also like Hudhayfa bin Utba and Arqam bin Abil-Arqam. And all those men whom Abu Bakr brought into Islam – Uthman, Talha, Zubayr, Abdur Rahman ibn Auf, Saad ibn Abi Waqqas and Abu Obaidah ibn al-Jarrah – were also rich and powerful. They were members of the various clans of the Quraysh.

We can assume that at the beginning, the pagan aristocrats of Makkah witnessed the efforts of Islam to win recognition, more with amusement than with irritation, not to speak of the hatred and the hysteria which gripped them a little later. But as the new movement began to gather momentum, they sensed that the ideas which Muhammad was broadcasting, were really "dangerous," and there was nothing funny about them. They argued that their forefathers had worshipped idols for countless generations, therefore idolatry was right; and they could not allow Muhammad to meddle with their mode of worship.

But Muhammad was not content merely with denouncing idolatry. Far more dangerous and frightening to the all-grasping Umayyads were his ideas of economic and social justice which threatened to pull down the fortress of their privileges; the old structure of authority and hierarchy; and all the fossilized institutions of the past. They made it clear, therefore, that privilege was something they were not going to relinquish – at any cost – come hell or high water.

But the one idea that the self-selected elite of the Quraysh found most outrageous, was the "notion," fostered by Muhammad, that the members of the depressed, despised and exploited classes, many of them their slaves, now converted to Islam, were their equals – the equals of the high and the mighty Quraysh! The staple of their life was conceit and arrogance, and equality with their own slaves, ex-slaves and clients, was utterly unthinkable to them. They were obsessed with delusions of their own "superiority" to the rest of mankind.

By promulgating the "heterodox" doctrine of equality – the equality of the master and the slave, the rich and the poor; and the Arab and the non-Arab; by repudiating claims ofsuperiority of the bloodline, and by teaching that in the sight of God, the status of a believer was infinitely higher than the status of all the unbelievers in the world, Muhammad had committed "lese majesty" against the Quraysh!

The Quraysh worshipped many idols, and race was one of them.

But racial pride is discounted by Islam. According to Al-Qur'an al-Majid, all men have descended from Adam, and Adam was a handful of dust. Iblis (Satan, the Devil) became the accursed one precisely because he argued for the superiority of what he presumed to be his high origins as against what he considered to be the lowly origins of man. "Man," he said, "was created from dust whereas I was created from fire." Such a sense of exclusivism which also comes to a people purely out of a desire to claim superior quality of blood in their beings, has been denounced by Islam in the strongest terms. Islam has knocked down the importance of race, nationality, color and privilege, and has forbidden Muslims to classify men into groups on grounds of blood and/or geographical contiguity or particular privilege which they might claim for themselves

In the sight of Qur'an, the most exalted person is the muttaqi – that is, one who loves and obeys God at all times. In Islam, the only test of a person's quality, is his or her love for the Creator. All other trappings of individual life are meaningless.

But as stated above, the Quraysh were not in a receptive mood for such ideas. They were perhaps intellectually incapable of grasping them. They considered them as rank blasphemy, and therefore, utterly intolerable. It was then that they resolved not only to oppose Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, but also to destroy the "heresy" called Islam itself before it could strike roots and become viable. They were driven by Hubris – the pride that inflates itself beyond the human scale – and by lust for power to make such a resolve against Muhammad and Islam.

With this resolution, the Quraysh declared their intention to fight in the defense of their idols and fetishes as well as in the defense of their economic and social system.

Makkah was in a state of war!

The Quraysh opened the campaign against Islam by harassing and persecuting the Muslims. At the beginning, persecution was confined to jeers, jibes and insults. But as time went on, the infidels moved from the violence of words to the violence of deeds. They refrained from inflicting physical injury upon Muhammad himself for fear of provoking reprisals; but they had no inhibitions in hurting the rank-and-file Muslims. For a long time, it were the latter who bore the brunt of the wrath of the Quraysh.

Ibn Ishaq

Then the Quraysh incited people against the companions of the Apostle who had become Muslims. Every tribe fell upon the Muslims among them, beating them and seducing them from their religion. God protected His Apostle from them through his uncle (Abu Talib), who, when he saw what Quraysh were doing, called upon Banu Hashim and Banu Al-Muttalib to stand with him in protecting the Apostle. This they agreed to do, with the exception of Abu Lahab.
(The Life of the Messenger of God)

Some victims of persecution:
Bilal, the Ethiopian slave of Umayya bin Khalaf. Umayya and other infidels tortured him in the savage glare of the torrid sun of Makkah, and they tortured him beyond the limits of human endurance. But he was fortified by inner sources of strength and courage which never failed him. Love of God and the love of His Messenger made it possible for him to endure torture with cheer. Abu Bakr bought him from his master and set him free. When the Apostle migrated to Medina, he appointed Bilal the first Muezzin of Islam. His rich and powerful voice rang through the air of Medina with the shout of Allah-o-Akbar (Great is the Lord). In later years, when the conquest of the peninsula was completed, the Apostle of God appointed Bilal his secretary of treasury.

Khabab ibn el-Arat was a young man of twenty when he accepted Islam. He was a client of Banu Zuhra. The Quraysh tortured him day after day. He migrated with the Prophet to Medina.

Suhaib bin Sinan had been captured and was sold as a slave by the Greeks. When he became a Muslim, the Quraysh beat him up savagely but could not shake his faith.

Abu Fukaiha was the slave of Safwan bin Umayya. He accepted Islam at the same time as Bilal. Like Bilal, he was also dragged by his master on hot sand with a rope tied to his feet. Abu Bakr bought him and emancipated him. He migrated to Medina with the Prophet but died before the battle of Badr.

Lubina was a female slave of Mumil bin Habib. Amin Dawidar writes in his book, Pictures From the Life of the Prophet (Cairo, Egypt, 1968), that Umar bin al-Khattab, the future khalifa of the Muslims, tortured her, and whenever he paused, he said: "I have not stopped beating you out of pity. I have stopped because I am exhausted." He resumed beating her after he had rested. Abu Bakr bought her and set her free.

Zunayra was another female slave. When she declared her faith in Islam, Umar ibn al-Khattab, and Abu Jahl, took turns in torturing her until she became blind. Amin Dawidar states that many years later she recovered her sight, and the Quraysh attributed this recovery to the "sorcery" of Muhammad. Abu Bakr bought her and set her free.

Nahdiyya and Umm Unays were two other female slaves who became Muslims. Their masters tortured them for accepting Islam. Abu Bakr bought them and gave them their freedom.

There were some other Muslims who were not slaves but they were "poor and weak." They too endured torture. Among them were Ammar ibn Yasir and his parents. Another member of this group was Abdullah ibn Masood, a young Muslim. He was distinguished among the companions of the Prophet by his knowledge and learning, and he was one of the earliest huffaz (men who knew Al-Qur'an al-Majid by heart) in Islam. As each new verse was revealed, he heard it from the Prophet and memorized it.

It is reported that whenSurah Rahman (the 55th chapter) was revealed, the Apostle of God asked his companions who among them would go into the Kaaba and read it before the infidels. Other companions hung back but Abdullah ibn Masood volunteered to go. He went into the Kaaba and read the new chapter out aloud. Next to the Apostle himself, Abdullah ibn Masood was the first man to read Qur'an in the Kaaba

before a hostile crowd of the infidels. The latter mauled him repeatedly but could not intimidate him into silence.

Ibn Ishaq

Yahya b. Urwa b. al-Zubayr told me as from his father that the first man to read the Qur'an loudly in Mecca after the Apostle was Abdullah bin Masud.

(Life of the Messenger of God)

Another member of this group was Abu Dharr elGhiffari. He belonged to the tribe of Ghiffar which made its living by brigandage. From travelers he heard that a prophet had appeared in Makkah who exhorted the Arabs to abandon idolatry, to worship only Allah, to speak nothing but the truth, and not to bury their daughters alive. He felt that he was strongly attracted to this Prophet, and traveled to Makkah to verify the veracity of the reports he had heard about him.

In Makkah Abu Dharr was a stranger. He had heard that Muhammad had made many enemies for himself by preaching against Arabian polytheism. He, therefore, hesitated to ask anyone about him. He spent the whole day in the shade of the Kaaba watching passers-by. In the evening, Ali ibn Abi Talib chanced to walk past him. Ali noticed that Abu Dharr was a stranger in town, and invited him to his home for supper. Abu Dharr accepted the invitation, and later appraised Ali of the purpose of his visit to Makkah. Ali, of course, was only too glad to conduct his guest into the presence of his master, Muhammad Mustafa. Abu Dharr learned from the Messenger of God the meaning of the message of Islam. He found both the messenger and the message irresistible. He was carried away by the power of the appeal of Islam. After accepting Islam, the very first thing that Abu Dharr wanted to do was to defy the infidels. He went into the Kaaba, and shouted:

"There is no God but Allah; and Muhammad is his Messenger."

As expected, the infidels fell upon him, and started raining blows upon him. From this brawl he was rescued by Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib, the uncle of the Prophet. He told the Makkans that Abu Dharr belonged to the tribe of Ghiffar whose territory lay astride the caravan routes to the north, and if they did any harm to him, his tribesmen would bar the access of their merchant caravans to Syria.

Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari is one of the most remarkable men in the history of Islam. He was the most fearless and the most outspoken man among all the companions of Muhammad Mustafa who once said that "the sky did not spread its canopy on any man who was more truthful than Abu Dharr."

Fear of violence by the Quraysh did not deter these heroic and noble souls from accepting Islam, and each of them left a mark upon it by his or her sacrifices.

Also notable among early Muslims was Mas'ab ibn Umayr, a cousin of the father of Muhammad. Many years later, at the First Pledge of Akaba, the citizens of Yathrib requested the Prophet to send with them a teacher of Qur’an, and the choice fell upon him. This made him the first "official" in Islam. He was also the standard-bearer of the army of Islam in the battle of Uhud but was killed in action.

If a member of a Makkan family accepted Islam, he was ostracized by it for all time, without any hope for him of rapprochement. Many Makkans saw Islam as a "divisive force" which was breaking up their families, and some of them thought that they ought to check this "divisiveness" from spreading. But beyond the threat of using force to suppress the new movement, they could not think of anything else that would prove more efficacious in halting its progress. They also thought that if they did not act swiftly and resolutely enough, it was not unlikely that every house in Makkah would become a battleground in which the protagonists of the old and the new faiths would be locked up in a sanguinary struggle against each other.

There were some others among the pagans who imagined that Muhammad was prompted by ambition to denounce their ancestral mode of worship and their idols. All of them put their heads together and tried to think of some unconventional solution of the problem. After a long discussion, they decided to send Utba, one of the chiefs of Quraysh, to meet Muhammad, and to try to "talk him out" of his mission. Utba was noted for his persuasive ability.

Utba called on the Apostle of God and said: "O Muhammad! Do not plant seeds of dissension and discord among the Arabs, and do not curse

the gods and goddesses our ancestors have worshipped for centuries, and we are worshipping today. If your aim in doing so is to become a political leader, we are willing to acknowledge you as the sovereign of Makkah. If you want wealth, you just have to say so, and we shall provide you with all that we can. And if you are desirous of marriage in some noble family, you name it, and we shall arrange it for you."

Muhammad heard everything that Utba said but instead of showing any interest in rank or wealth or beauty, he read before him Surah Sajda, (32nd chapter of Qur’an), the newest revelation from Heaven. When the recitation was over, Utba returned to the Quraysh and advised them to leave Muhammad alone and not to meddle with him any more. He also told them that if Muhammad failed in his work, then they (the Quraysh) would lose nothing; but if he succeeded in it, then they would share all his power and glory.

But the Quraysh did not accept Utba's advice for restraint in dealing with Muhammad and his followers. They continued to persecute the Muslims as before and kept trying to think of some new wrinkle which would yield better results in halting the progress of Islam than all their violence had done until then.

Muhammad was protected by his uncle and guardian, Abu Talib. As long as Abu Talib was alive, the pagans could not molest his nephew. It occurred to some of them that they ought perhaps to persuade Abu Talib himself to waive his protection of Muhammad in the name of tribal solidarity. After all, tribal solidarity was something much too important to be treated with levity even by Abu Talib, notwithstanding all his love for his nephew

The Quraysh decided to send a delegation, composed of the leading figures of the tribe, to Abu Talib. The delegation called on him, and appealed to him in the name of the tribal solidarity of the Quraysh to waive his protection of Muhammad who was "disrupting" it so recklessly.

Abu Talib, of course, had no intention of waiving his protection of Muhammad. But he mollified the Qurayshi delegates with pious platitudes and placatory words, and they returned to their homes "empty-handed."

The delegates also realized that they had come home from a "phantom-chase;" but they were unfazed by their failure, and sometime later, they made another attempt to break up the "alliance" of Abu Talib and Muhammad. A new delegation went to see Abu Talib, and this time, its members took with them a handsome young man, one Ammarra ibn Walid, whom they offered to Abu Talib for a "son" if he surrendered Muhammad to them.

Abu Talib must have laughed at this new gambit of the Quraysh. Did they really believe that he would give them his own son for them to kill him, and that he would rear one of their sons as his own? The idea was most ludicrous but once again, Abu Talib handled the situation with his customary finesse, and they went back.

The second attempt of the Quraysh to coax Abu Talib into giving up Muhammad, had also failed. When the meaning of this failure sank into their minds, they realized that peaceful attempts to solve the problem had all been fruitless. They decided to try something more drastic.

In sheer exasperation and frustration, the policy-makers of Quraysh adopted a tougher stance and sent their third and the last delegation to Abu Talib. Its purpose was to compel him to surrender Muhammad to them. The leaders of the delegation presented an ultimatum to Abu Talib: either he had to surrender Muhammad to them or else he would have to face the consequences of his refusal to do so.

Abu Talib was a man of cheerful temperament and sunny disposition, but it was a somber day in his life. The Quraysh, he knew, were not bluffing. He therefore called Muhammad and appraised him of the purport of the Qurayshi representation, and then added: "O life of your uncle! Do not place a burden upon me that I may find beyond my strength to carry."

Muhammad answered: "O my uncle! If the Quraysh place the sun on my right hand and the moon on my left, I shall not refrain from proclaiming the Oneness of God. In the execution of this duty, either I shall succeed and Islam shall spread; or, if I fail, I shall perish in the attempt."

Abu Talib was not the one to dissuade Muhammad from preaching Islam. But he was testing his resolution. Muhammad's forthright answer

convinced and satisfied him that he would not falter, and he said: "Go my son, and do whatever you like. No one will dare to do any harm to you."

Sir William Muir

… but the thought of desertion by his kind protector (Abu Talib) overcame him (Muhammad). He burst into tears, and turned to depart. Then Abu Talib called aloud: "Son of my brother! Come back." So he returned. And Abu Talib said: "Depart in peace, my nephew, and say whatever thou desirest. For by the Lord, I will not, in any wise, give thee up ever." (The Life of Mohammed, 1877)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Abu Talib said: "Go forth, my nephew, and say what you will. By God I swear I shall never betray you to your enemies."

Abu Talib communicated his resolution to Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib and spoke to them about his nephew with great admiration and deep appreciation of the sublimity of Muhammad's position. He asked them all to protect Muhammad against the Quraysh. All of them pledged to do so except Abu Lahab who declared openly his enmity to him and his withdrawal to the opposite camp.

… ..Quraysh inflicted upon Muhammad's companions all sorts of injuries from which he was saved only through the protection of Abu Talib, Banu Hashim, and Banu al-Muttalib. The Life of Muhammad)

Foiled and checkmated repeatedly in this manner by Abu Talib, the patience of the idolaters reached the breaking point. After the failure of their third embassy to Abu Talib, they resolved to let loose all their frustrations and pent-up fury on the unprotected Muslims. They hoped to crush the new faith with terror and cruelty.

The first victims of pagan attrition and aggression were those Muslims who had no tribal affiliation in Makkah. Yasir and his wife, Sumayya, and their son, Ammar, had no tribal affiliation. In Makkah they were "foreigners" and there was no one to protect them. All three were savagely tortured by Abu Jahl and the other infidels. Sumayya, Yasir's wife,

died while she was being tortured. She thus became the First Martyr in Islam. A little later, her husband, Yasir, was also tortured to death, and he became the Second Martyr in Islam.

Quraysh had stained their hands with innocent blood! In the roster of martyrs, Sumayya and her husband, Yasir, rank among the highest. They were killed for no reason other than their devotion to Allah and their love for Islam and Muhammad Mustafa. Those Muslims who were killed in the battles of Badr and Uhud, had an army to defend and to support them. But Yasir and his wife had no one to defend them; they bore no arms, and they were the most defenseless of all the martyrs of Islam. By sacrificing their lives, they highlighted the truth of Islam, and they built strength into its structure. They made the tradition of sacrifice and martyrdom an integral part of the ethos of Islam.

Bilal, Khabab ibn el-Arat, Suhaib Rumi, and other poor and unprotected Muslims were made to stand in the torrid sun, and were flogged by the infidels. Food and water were denied to them in the vain hope that hunger and thirst will compel them to abandon Muhammad and Islam

If the Quraysh found Muhammad alone, they seized the opportunity to molest him. They of course wished to kill him but they had to curb this urge. If they had killed him, they would have touched off vendetta or even civil war.

On one occasion, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, went into the Kaaba to read Al-Qur'an al-Majid. He was reading Qur'an when suddenly he was surrounded by the idolaters. They mobbed him, and they might have done him some great harm but for the intervention of Harith ibn Abi Hala, the nephew and the adopted son of Khadija, who happened to arrive on the scene just then. He entered the melee to defend the Messenger of God from the violence of the polytheists of Makkah.

Harith ibn Abi Hala kicked the infidels and fought with his fists. Most probably, he too was carrying a sword as all Arabs did but he did not wish to draw it, and to cause bloodshed in the precincts of the Kaaba. But in the fracas, one of the idolaters drew his dagger, and stabbed him repeatedly. He fell in a pool of his own blood, and died from multiple

wounds in his chest, shoulders and temple. He was the first Muslim to be killed in the precincts of the Kaaba.

Harith was a young man of seventeen, and he made his life an oblation for Muhammad, the Apostle of God. He was the youngest victim of the spiraling and escalating violence of the infidels. He won the aureole of martyrdom to become the Third Martyr in Islam. His death, so early in life, made the Prophet extremely sad.

The Arab historians are silent on this subject but much bitter fighting must have taken place in Makkah between the Muslims and the idolaters during the years before the migration of the Prophet to Medina. Abu Talib protected his nephew as long as he lived. After his death, this duty devolved upon his son, Ali.

Ali was still a teenager when he appointed himself the body-guard of Muhammad, the Apostle of God. After the murder, in Kaaba, of Harith ibn Abi Hala, Ali accompanied his master whenever the latter went out of his house, and stood between him and his enemies. If a ruffian approached Muhammad menacingly, Ali at once challenged him, and came to grips with him

D. S. Margoliouth

The persons whose admission to Islam was most welcomed were men of physical strength, and much actual fighting must have taken place at Mecca before the Flight; else the readiness with which the Moslems after the Flight could produce from their number tried champions, would be inexplicable. A tried champion must have been tried somewhere; and no external fights are recorded or are even the subject of an allusion for this period. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

There were no external fights in Makkah before the Migration of the Prophet to Medina but there were many fights in the streets and open spaces of the city. It was in these "battlefields" that Ali, the young lion, acquired all his martial skills. These "battles" in Makkah were a "dress rehearsal" of the role he was destined to play a few years later in Medina in the armed struggle of Islam and paganism. It was also in these early days, before the Migration of the Prophet to Medina, that Ali became "the first line of the defense of Islam." In fact, he also became, at the same

time, the second line and the last line of the defense of Islam. This he and he alone, was to remain for the rest of his life.

Quraysh tortured the bodies of the unprotected Muslims in Makkah in the hope that they would compel them to forswear Islam, but they failed. No one from these "poor and weak" Muslims ever abjured Islam. Adverse circumstances can collaborate to break even the strongest of men, and for the Muslims, the circumstances could not have been more adverse. But those circumstances could not break them. Islam held them together.

For these "poor and weak" Muslims, Islam was a "heady" experience. It had pulled life together for them; had put meaning into it, had run purpose through it, and had put horizons around it. They, therefore, spurned security, comforts and luxuries of life; and some among them like Sumayya and her husband, Yasir, spurned life itself; but they upheld their Faith. They died but they did not compromise with Falsehood.

May God be pleased with these heroic and noble souls and may He bless them. Their faith and morale were, as the Quraysh discovered, just as unconquerable as the faith and morale of their master and leader, Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God. They were diamonds that Muhammad found in the rocks of the world. They were few in number but priceless in value; to be expressed, not by quantity but only by quality, and that quality was sublime.

Chapter 11

The Two Migrations of Muslims to Abyssinia (A.D. 615-616)

Muhammad Mustafa (may God bless him and his Ahlul-Bait), shared all the sorrows and afflictions of his followers who were being persecuted for believing that "God is One", but he had no means to protect them. When the violence of the polytheists against the Muslims didn't show any sign of de-escalating, he suggested to them to leave Makkah and to seek sanctuary in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) which was then ruled by a Christian king, well-known for being a just and God-fearing man. Following this suggestion, a group of Muslims, comprising eleven men and four women, left Makkah and went to Abyssinia. The group included Uthman bin Affan, a future khalifa of the Muslims; his wife, Ruqayya; and Zubayr bin al-Awwam, a cousin of the Prophet. The Prophet appointed Uthman bin Mazoon, one of his principal companions, as the leader of this group.

Ibn Ishaq

When the Apostle saw the afflictions of his companions and that though he escaped it because of his standing with Allah and his uncle, Abu Talib, he could not protect them, he said to them: ‘If you were to go to Abyssinia (it would be better for you), for the king (there) will not tolerate injustice and it is a friendly country, until such time as Allah shall relieve you from your distress.' Thereupon his companions went to Abyssinia, being afraid of apostasy and fleeing to God with their religion. This was the first hijra in Islam. (The Life of the Messenger of God)

The first migration took place in the fifth year of the Proclamation – in A.D. 615.

The king of Abyssinia welcomed the Muslim refugees from Makkah into his kingdom. He gave them sanctuary, and they enjoyed peace, security and freedom of worship under his aegis. About a year later, the Muslims in Abyssinia heard rumors that the Quraysh in Makkah had accepted Islam. If it was true then there was no reason for them to live in exile. They were homesick, and they decided to return to Makkah. But when they arrived in Makkah, they found out that not only the rumors they had heard were false, but also that the Quraysh had stepped up the persecution of the Muslims. They, therefore, left Makkah once again. Many other Muslims also accompanied them. This new group comprised 83 men and 18 women. Muhammad Mustafa appointed his first cousin, Jaafer ibn Abi Talib, an elder brother of Ali, as the leader of this group.

This second migration of the Muslims to Abyssinia took place in the sixth year of the Proclamation, which corresponds to the year A.D. 616.

The migration of the Muslims to Abyssinia, and their reception at the friendly court of that country, alarmed the Quraysh. They entertained the fear that Muslims might grow in strength, or find new allies, and then, some day, might return to Makkah to challenge them. To head off this potential threat, such as they saw it, they decided to send an embassy to the court of the king of Abyssinia to try to persuade him to extradite the Muslims to Makkah.

The Muslim refugees who had expected to be left in peace, were surprised by the arrival, in the Abyssinian capital, of an embassy from Makkah, led by a certain Amr bin Aas. Amr had brought rich presents for the king and his courtiers to ingratiate himself with them.

When the king gave audience to the emissary of the Quraysh, he said that the Muslims in Abyssinia were not refugees from persecution but were fugitives from justice and law, and requested him to extradite them to Makkah. The king, however, wanted to hear the other side of the story also before giving any judgment, and summoned Jaafer ibn Abi Talib to the court to answer the charges against the Muslims.

Jaafer made a most memorable defense. Following is a summary of his speech in the court of Abyssinia in answer to the questions posed by the Christian king.

"O King! We were ignorant people and we lived like wild animals. The strong among us lived by preying upon the weak. We obeyed no law and we acknowledged no authority save that of brute force. We worshipped idols made of stone or wood, and we knew nothing of human dignity. And then God, in His Mercy, sent to us His Messenger who was himself one of us. We knew about his truthfulness and his integrity. His character was exemplary, and he was the most well-born of the Arabs. He invited us toward the worship of One God, and he forbade us to worship idols. He exhorted us to tell the truth, and to protect the weak, the poor, the humble, the widows and the orphans. He ordered us to show respect to women, and never to slander them. We obeyed him and followed his teachings. Most of the people in our country are still polytheists, and they resented our conversion to the new faith which is called Islam. They began to persecute us and it was in order to escape from persecution by them that we sought and found sanctuary in your kingdom."

When Jaaffer concluded his speech, the king asked him to read some verses which were revealed to the Prophet of the Muslims. Jaafer read a few verses from Surah Maryam (Mary), the 19th chapter of Al-Qur'an al-Majid. When the king heard these verses, he said that their fountainhead was the same as that of the verses of the Evangel. He then declared that he was convinced of his veracity, and added, to the great chagrin of Amr bin Aas, that the Muslims were free to live in his kingdom for as long as they wished.

But Amr bin Aas bethought himself of a new stratagem, which, he felt confident, would tilt the scales against Jaafer. On the following day, therefore, he returned to the court and said to the king that he (the king) ought to waive his protection of the Muslims because they rejected the divine nature of Christ, and claimed that he was a mortal like other men. When questioned on this point by the king, Jaafer said: "Our judgment of Jesus is the same as that of Allah and His Messenger, viz., Jesus is God's servant, His Prophet, His Spirit, and His command given unto Mary, the innocent virgin."

The king said: "Jesus is just what you have stated him to be, and is nothing more than that." Then addressing the Muslims, he said: "Go to your homes and live in peace. I shall never give you up to your enemies." He refused to extradite the Muslims, returned the presents which Amr bin Aas had brought, and dismissed his embassy.

Washington Irving

Among the refugees to Abyssinia, there was Jaafer, the son of Abu Talib, and brother of Ali, consequently the cousin of Mohammed. He was a man of persuasive eloquence and a most prepossessing appearance. He stood forth before the king of Abyssinia, and expounded the doctrines of Islam with zeal and power. The king who was a Nestorian Christian, found these doctrines so similar in many respects to those of his sect and so opposed to the gross idolatry of the Koreishites, that so far from giving up the fugitives, he took them more especially into favor and protection, and returning to Amr b. Aas and Abdullah, the presents they had brought, dismissed them from his court. (Life of Mohammed)

Muslims spent many years in Abyssinia and lived there in peace. Thirteen years later – in 7 A.H. (A.D. 628) – they returned, not to Makkah but to Medina. Their arrival synchronized with the conquest of Khyber by the Muslims.

Jaafer ibn Abi Talib was the leader of all those Muslims who had migrated to Abyssinia in 615 and 616. He appears to have been the only member of the clan of Banu Hashim to leave for Abyssinia with the other refugees. All other members of Banu Hashim stayed in Makkah.

Montgomery Watt

Apart from two exceptions all the early Muslims who remained in Mecca (and did not go to Abyssinia) belonged to a group of five clans, headed by Mohammed's clan of Hashim. This group seems to be a reconstituted form of the League of the Virtuous. It is thus the focus of the opposition to the leading merchants with their monopolistic practices. (Mohammed, Prophet and Statesman, 1961)

Chapter 12

Hamza Accepts Islam - A.D. 615

Muhammad, the Apostle of God, though safe under the protection of his uncle, Abu Talib, was not immune from harassment by the polytheists. Whenever they found an opportunity to pester him, they didn't miss it. On one occasion Abu Jahl found him alone, and used much vulgar and offensive language toward him. The same evening when his uncle, Hamza ibn Abdul Muttalib, came home from a hunting expedition, his slave-girl recounted to him the tale of Abu Jahl's gratuitous insolence toward Muhammad and the latter's forbearance, of which she had been an eye-witness.

Hamza was a warrior, a hunter and a sportsman, and was little interested in the day-to-day affairs of the city. But Abu Jahl's conduct toward his nephew so roused his anger that he seized his bow, and went into the assembly of the Quraysh where he (Abu Jahl) was reviewing the events of the day to his compeers. Hamza struck him on his head with his bow, causing it to bleed, and said: "I too have become a Muslim."

This was a challenge to Abu Jahl but he figured that silence was the better part of valor, and did not tangle with Hamza, even restraining his friends who wished to rise in his defense.

Betty Kelen

Muhammad's uncle, Hamza, a man of his own age, was reputed to be the strongest and most active of the Quraysh, their champion in war and sports. He spent most of his time hunting in the hills. One day when he returned from the chase with his bow swinging from his shoulder, his slave-girl told him how Abu Jahl had heaped abuse on his nephew's head.

Hamza found himself at the end of all patience. He liked Muhammad, although he did not understand him (sic). He went on the run to the mosque, where he saw Abu Jahl sitting among his friends. He lifted his heavy bow and gave a great bang on his head with it. 'Will you insult him when I join his religion?' he shouted, flexing his great muscles under the noses of the Quraysh.

Hamza became a Muslim, and this put teeth into the faith. Some of the Quraysh were more careful about calling Muhammad a poet. (Muhammad, the Messenger of God, 1975)

Hamza became a devout Muslim and a champion of Islam. He was the comrade-in-arms of his other nephew, Ali, and it were both of them who killed most of the leaders of the Quraysh in the battle of Badr, to be fought a few years later.

In the battle of Uhud, Hamza killed the second standard-bearer of the pagans, and when they charged the Muslim line, he plunged into their midst. He was hacking his way through their ranks when he was struck by a javelin hurled by Wahshi, an Abyssinian slave. Wahshi was engaged for this very purpose, by Hinda, the wife of Abu Sufyan and the mother of Muawiya, and by another idolater of Makkah. Hamza fell on the ground and died immediately.

After the rout of the Muslims that day, Hinda and the other harpies from Makkah, mutilated the bodies of the slain Muslims. She cut open Hamza's abdomen, plucked out his liver, and chewed it up. She also cut his nose, ears, hands and feet, strung them into a "necklace," and entered Makkah wearing it as a trophy of war.

Muhammad Mustafa was deeply aggrieved at the death and at the mutilation of the body of such a stalwart of Islam as Hamza. He bestowed upon him the titles of the "Lion of God," and the "Chief of the Martyrs."

Hamza accepted Islam in the fifth year of the Proclamation.

Chapter 13

Umar's Conversion to Islam - A.D. 616

The most notable event of the year 6 of the Proclamation was the conversion to Islam of Umar bin al-Khattab, a future khalifa of the Muslims. He was one of the most rabid enemies of Islam and of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, and was a great tormentor of the Muslims. The modern Egyptian historian, Amin Dawidar, says that Umar's hatred of Islam, and his hostility to Muhammad, were matched only by the hatred of, and hostility to them, of his own maternal uncle, Abu Jahl.

It is said that one day in sheer exasperation, Umar resolved to kill Muhammad, and thus to extinguish the flame of Islam itself. He left his home with this intention.

As already noted, the Muslims at this time (the last days of the year 6) still gathered in the house of Arqam bin Abi al-Arqam to say their congregational prayers. They were beginning to assemble when one of them, looking out the window, saw Umar approaching toward the house with a drawn sword. In a state of considerable alarm, he told the other members of the congregation what he saw. Presumably, they too were alarmed. But Hamza, who was also present in the house of Arqam, reassured them, and said that if Umar was coming with good intentions, then it was all right; but if not, then he (Hamza) would run him (Umar) through with his (Umar's) own sword. But it so happened that Umar had come with the intention of accepting Islam, and he did.

The story is told that Umar was going toward Dar-ul-Arqam with the intention of killing Muhammad when a passer-by stopped him, and informed him that his own sister and her husband had become Muslims, and advised him to put his own house in order before undertaking any other grandiose and chimerical project.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Umar went there (to Dar-ul-Arqam) resolved to kill Muhammad and thus relieve the Quraysh of its burden, restore its ravaged unity, and re-establish respect for the gods that Muhammad had castigated. On the road to Makkah he was met by Nu'aym ibn Abdullah. Upon learning what Umar was about, Nu'aym said, "By God, you have deceived yourself, O Umar! Do you think that Banu Abd Manaf would let you run around alive once you had killed their son Muhammad? Why don't you return to your own house and at least set it straight?" (The Life of Muhammad)

Umar was furious to hear that his sister and her husband had become Muslims. He immediately changed his direction from Arqam's house to her house to investigate the allegation. In reply to his questions, she gave a discreet but evasive answer.

Ibn Ishaq

Umar came to the door (of the house of his sister) as Khabbab (a companion of the Prophet) was studying under her guidance the Sura Taha and also "When the Sun is Overthrown" (81:1). The polytheists used to call this reading "rubbish". When Umar came in, his sister saw that he meant mischief and hid the sheets from which they were reading. Khabbab slipped away into the house. Umar asked what was the gibberish he had heard, to which she answered that it was merely conversation between them… " (The Life of the Messenger of God)

Umar exploded in wrath at what he believed to be a prevarication, and struck his sister in her face. The blow caused her mouth to bleed. He was going to strike again but the sight of blood made him pause. He suddenly appeared to relent, and then in a changed tone asked her to show him what she was reading. She sensed a change in him but said: "You are an unclean idolater, and I cannot allow you to touch the Word of God."

Umar immediately went away, washed himself, returned to his sister's home, read the text of Qur'an, and then went to the house of Arqam where he formally accepted Islam.

Sir William Muir says that Umar's conversion to Islam took place at the close of the sixth year of the Prophet's mission. He adds the following footnote:

It (Umar's conversion) occurred in Dhul Hijjah the last month of the year. The believers are said now to have amounted in all to 40 men and ten women; or by other accounts, to 45 men and eleven women. (The Life of Mohammed, 1877, p. 95)

Umar was about 35 years old when he became a Muslim.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

At that time, (when he was converted to Islam) Umar ibn al Khattab was a mature man of thirty to thirty-five years of age. (The Life of Muhammad)

Many Muslims claim that with Umar's conversion, Islam recruited new strength, and Muslims were now emboldened to dare the pagans. They could, according to these claims, now come out of their places of hiding, and pray openly in the precincts of Kaaba, or rather, it was Umar himself who brought them out of their hiding places, and they were not now afraid of Abu Jahl or of anyone else.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

The Muslims who returned from Abyssinia did so for two reasons. First, Umar ibn al Khattab was converted to Islam shortly after their emigration. With him, he brought to the Muslim camp the same boldness, determination, and the tribal standing with which he had been fighting the Muslims before. He never concealed his conversion nor did he ever shun the Quraysh opponents. On the contrary, he proclaimed his conversion publicly and challenged the Quraysh openly. He did not approve the Muslims' concealment of themselves, their secret movement from one end of Makkah to the other, and their holding of prayers at a safe distance from any Quraysh attack. Umar began to fight the Quraysh as soon as he entered the faith of Islam, constantly pressed his way close to the Kaaba, and performed his prayer there in company with whatever Muslims decided to join him. (The Life of Muhammad)

But these curious claims find little support in evidence. And if the evidence means anything, it appears to run counter to the claims themselves.

Some claims are even more extravagant. For example, the Egyptian historian, Amin Dawidar, says in his book, Pictures From the Life of the Messenger of God, that Umar's conversion to Islam was a death blow to the Quraysh.

What actually happened was that Umar's conversion to Islam synchronized with a new and an unprecedented wave of terror that broke over the Muslims. Whereas before his conversion only those Muslims were victims of persecution who had no one to protect them, now no Muslim, not even Muhammad Mustafa himself, was safe from the malevolence of the polytheists.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

In their exile (in Abyssinia), they (the emigrants) heard that upon Umar's conversion the Quraysh had stopped their persecution of Muhammad and his followers. According to one report a number of them had returned to Makkah, according to another, all. On reaching Makkah they realized that the Quraysh had resumed persecution of the Muslims with stronger hatred and renewed vigor. Unable to resist, a number of them returned to Abyssinia while others entered Makkah under the cover of night and hid themselves away. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

But this was not all. Much more was yet to come. Now Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, could not even live in Makkah. In fact, little more than a week had passed since Umar's conversion to Islam, when Muhammad and all members of his family and clan, had to leave Makkah, and had to go into exile. Therefore, the theory that Umar's conversion to Islam caused Muslims to abandon their caution and defensive posture, and to defy the infidels, is simply not coincident with facts.

S. Margoliouth

… ..we have no record of any occasion on which Umar displayed remarkable courage, though many examples are at hand of his cruelty and

bloodthirstiness; at the battle of Hunain he ran away, and on another occasion owed his life to the good nature of an enemy. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, 1931)

Professor Margoliouth has made a reference to the occasion when a good-natured enemy spared Umar's life. He must be referring to the battle of the Trench or the Siege of Medina (A.D. 627). In that battle, Ali ibn Abi Talib killed the Makkan general, Amr ibn Abd Wudd, whereupon his (Amr's) comrades-in-arms hastily retreated across the Trench. When they were retreating, Umar tried to overtake one of them. This knight, who was in retreat, had heard that Ali never pursued a fleeing enemy. He, therefore, figured that whoever was pursuing him then, could not be Ali. Out of curiosity, he stole a glance backwards and noticed that it was Umar who was bearing down upon him. When he saw Umar, he immediately turned the reins of his horse to face him, and this made him (Umar) stop. The knight who knew Umar, said to him: "If my mother had not made me vow that I would never kill a Qurayshi, you would be a dead man now. Be grateful to her, and do not forget that I have spared your life."

It may be noted that Hamza had accepted Islam one year before Umar became a Muslim, and he had signalized his conversion by striking Abu Jahl, the maternal uncle of Umar, with his bow. One may not expect Umar to emulate Hamza's example by striking his own uncle, but there is no record that he struck any other idolater for showing insolence to the Apostle of God. Furthermore, when Hamza accepted Islam and bloodied the nose of Abu Jahl, Umar himself was an idolater. It was his duty, in the name of "tribal solidarity," to challenge Hamza, and to defend the honor of the brother of his mother. After all, according to many claims in circulation, he was the most fearless, the most fear-inspiring, the most violent-tempered, and the most headstrong man in Makkah. And who but Umar would dare to challenge Hamza? But the challenge never came.

Chapter 14

The Economic and Social Boycott of the Banu Hashim (A.D. 616-619)

The year 6 of the Proclamation was drawing to a close. The pagans had already spent three years campaigning against Islam. They had generated much bitterness and hostility against the Muslims during these three years, but they had very little, if anything, to show for their efforts. They had used every weapon against the Muslims ranging from temptation to persuasion, to insults to jibes, and mockery to the threat of using force and the actual use of force, but to no avail. The strength of the faith of the Muslims had baffled them.

Their repeated failures compelled the Quraysh to reassess the situation vis-à-vis Muhammad and Islam, and some of them tried to see their problem from a new angle. In their search for a solution to the vexatious problem, it slowly began to dawn upon them that their enemy was not the group of rootless and poverty-stricken Muslims in Makkah. The real enemy – the enemy of the idolaters and the polytheists – they realized, was Abu Talib! After all it was Abu Talib who was protecting Muhammad and Islam so consistently and tenaciously. The Muslims, on the other hand, had no power to protect Muhammad. In fact, they were themselves in desperate need of protection.

This success in "enemy identification" had the impact of revelation upon the leaders of Quraysh in their campaign against Islam, and enabled them to map out a new strategy.

Abd-al-Rahman 'Azzam

Finally, the Makkan oligarchy decided in desperation to take steps against Abu Talib. In their opinion, he was the real protector of the

blasphemy, although still a revered upholder of Makkan institutions and unconverted to Muhammad's faith (sic). They agreed to send him an ultimatum… (The Eternal Message of Muhammad, London, 1964)

In the past, the Quraysh had made many attempts to "isolate" Muhammad from his clan, and they had hoped that they would either coax or bluff Abu Talib into waiving his support and protection of his nephew and of Islam. If they could isolate Muhammad from his clan, they were convinced, they would be able to solve the complex and thorny problem by the simple process of "liquidating" him.

But Abu Talib did not let the Quraysh "isolate" Muhammad. Not only he was himself protecting his nephew, he had also rallied the whole clan of Banu Hashim behind him. The clan of Banu Hashim was monolithic in its support of Muhammad, and the leaders of the Quraysh found themselves powerless before it.

After long deliberation and debate, the Quraysh agreed that the "intractability" of Banu Hashim called for sterner measures, and they decided to isolate and ostracize not only Muhammad but all his protectors as well, viz., the clan of Banu Hashim.

It was inevitable that any attempt to ostracize Banu Hashim would lead to a polarization of the groupings in Makkah. Everyone in Makkah would have to declare himself for or against Banu Hashim. But it soon became obvious that in this confrontation, Banu Hashim would find the whole of Arabia ranged against itself.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

It is nearly impossible for us to imagine the intensity and extent of the efforts which Quraysh spent in its struggle against Muhammad, or its perseverance during many long years of that struggle.The Quraysh threatened Muhammad and his relatives, especially his uncles. It ridiculed him and his message, and it insulted him as well as his followers. It commissioned its poets to revile him with their sharpest wits and to direct their most caustic sting against his preaching. It inflicted injury and harm on his person and on the persons of his followers. It offered him bribes of money, of royalty and power, of all that which satisfies the most fastidious among men. It not only Banushed and dispersed his

followers from their own country but injured them in their trade and commerce while impoverishing them. It warned him and his followers that war with all its tragedies would befall upon them. As a last resort, it began a boycott of them designed to starve them. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

A few days before the beginning of the year 7, the leaders of the various clans of Quraysh met in a solemn conclave in the "town hall" of Makkah, and there, by consensus, they drafted and signed a document which stipulated that unless the clan of Banu Hashim surrendered Muhammad to them, it would be subjected to an economic and social boycott. They pledged themselves not to buy anything from, nor to sell anything to, the members of the Banu Hashim, and they placed intermarriage with them under proscription.

This covenant was sent to the other tribes for ratification. When they had ratified it, it was solemnly suspended on the wall of the Kaaba. The ratification of the covenant was a belligerent act!

Abu Talib could clearly see that a storm system was converging upon the Banu Hashim. The a

Atmosphere in Makkah had become so explosive that Banu Hashim found itself in great peril. Abu Talib realized that it would not be prudent to live in the city where any moment, the enemy could set fire to their houses. In the interests of the security of the clan, he, therefore, decided to leave Makkah, and to seek safety for it in a ravine near Makkah which later came to be known as Sh'ib Abu Talib. The ravine had some natural defenses, and it was in any case safer to live in it than to live in their houses in the city which were highly vulnerable to attack.

On the first day of the year 7 of the Proclamation, therefore, the two clans of Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib moved out of Makkah and took abode in a ravine. The clans were in a state of siege.

It was going to be a long siege!

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

The pact into which the clans of Quraysh had entered for boycotting Muhammad and blockading the Muslims continued to be observed for three consecutive years. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Marmaduke Pickthall

For three years, the Prophet was shut up with all his kinsfolk in their stronghold which was situated in one of the gorges which run down to Mecca. (Introduction to the Translation of Holy Qur'an, 1975)

The story of the siege of Banu Hashim is a stirring chapter in the epic of Islam, and has been told by every historian of the subject, among them:

Sir William Muir

… ..the Coreish entered into a confederacy against the Hashimites – that they would not marry their women, nor give their own in marriage to them; that they would sell nothing to them, nor buy aught from them; and that dealings with them of every kind should cease.

The ban was carefully committed to writing, and sealed with three seals. When all had bound themselves by it, the record was hung up in the Kaaba, and religious sanction thus given to its provisions.

The Hashimites were unable to withstand the tide of public opinion which set in thus violently against them, and apprehensive perhaps that it might be only the prelude of open attack, or of blows in the dark still more fatal, they retired into the secluded quarter of the city known as Sheb of Abu Talib. It was formed by one of the defiles or indentations of the mountains, where the projecting rocks of Abu Cobeis pressed upon the eastern outskirts of Mecca. It was entered on the cityside by a low gateway, through which a camel passed with difficulty. On all other sides it was detached from the town by cliffs and buildings.

On the first night of the first month of the seventh year of the mission of Mohammed, the Hashimites, including the prophet and his family, retired into the quarter of Abu Talib; and with them followed also the descendants of Al-Muttalib, the brother of Hashim. The ban of separation was put rigorously in force. The Hashimites soon found themselves cut off from their supplies of corn and other necessities of life; and a great scarcity ensued … the failing stock of the Hashimites replenished only by occasional and surreptitious ventures, reduced them to want and distress. The citizens could hear the wailing of the famished children within the Sheb … among the relatives of the isolated band, were found some

who ventured, in spite of threats of the Coreish, to introduce from time to time provisions by stealth at night, into the quarter of Abu Talib. Hakim, grandson of Khuwalid, used, though the attempt was sometimes perilous, to carry supplies to his aunt Khadija. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

At the beginning of the siege, Ali was 16 years old, and he was charged with the difficult and dangerous duty of victualling the whole clan. He discharged this duty at great risk to his life and brought water and grain whenever he could find any. For one goatskin of water, he had to pay one piece of gold, and he considered himself lucky if he succeeded in bringing it to the ravine. His efforts, however, brought only partial relief to the beleaguered tribe.

Abu Talib himself didn't sleep at nights. For him the physical safety of his nephew took precedence over everything else. When Muhammad fell asleep, Abu Talib woke him up, and asked him to sleep in the bed of one of his four sons, and ordered his son to sleep in his (Muhammad's) bed. A little later, he would wake his nephew again, and ask him to go to the bed of another of his sons.

He spent the whole night shifting Muhammad out of one bed and putting him in another. He had no illusions about his enemies; they were tenacious, treacherous, vicious and vindictive. He, therefore, did not underestimate them. If one of them crept into the ravine with the intention of killing Muhammad, he would most probably, kill one of the sons of Abu Talib. Abu Talib and his wife were ever ready to sacrifice their sons for Muhammad.

There were times when Ali, notwithstanding his daring and his resourcefulness, was unable to find any provision, and the children (and the adults) went hungry. But going hungry and thirsty was a norm in the ravine. When water was available, mothers boiled dead leaves in it to comfort their crying children. The cry of hungry children could be heard outside the ravine, and Abu Jahl and the Umayyads responded to it with derisive laughter. They gloated over their "triumph" in making the children of Banu Hashim cry for water and food.

The most precious gift for the besieged clans during these three years, was water. Water was the gift of life, and the two clans received it from

Khadija. She gave Ali the pieces of gold with which he bought water. Her concern for those around her manifested itself in various ways. She prayed to God and invoked His mercy upon the besieged. Prayer was her "strategy" for handling adversity. It was, she found, a simple butef-fective strategy.

Occasionally, the few friends that the members of Banu Hashim had in Makkah, tried to smuggle food into the ravine, but if the pagans caught it, they seized it.

One of the friends of Banu Hashim in Makkah was Hisham ibn Amr al-Aamiri. He brought food and water for them as often as he could. The time he had chosen to deliver the provisions into the ravine, was a few hours before daybreak; but eventually the Quraysh caught him, and they threatened to kill him if he persisted in bringing his loaded camels to the ravine for Banu Hashim.

Another secret friend of Banu Hashim was Hakim ibn Hizam, the nephew of Khadija. He and his slave carried food and water to Khadija which she immediately gave to the children.

Abul Bukhtari was one of the friends of Hakim. He too brought essential supplies to Banu Hashim. One night he and Hakim were driving a camel to the ravine when they were surprised by Abu Jahl. He told them that he was going to confiscate the provisions and the camel. At first, Abul Bukhtari tried to conciliate him with words but he didn't want to hear anything. He barred the access to the ravine and refused to let them pass. Abul Bukhtari tried to force his way past Abu Jahl, and this led to a violent fist fight between them. Brawls like this erupted quite frequently near the ravine but the few friends that the clan of Banu Hashim had in the city, did not lose heart, and did everything they could to bring succor to it.

Hisham bin Amr al-Aamiri, Hakim bin Hizam, and Abul Bukhtari, were not Muslims but they did not want to see any child or even a slave of Banu Hashim perish from hunger, and they risked their own lives time and again in bringing food and water to the Sh'ib Abu Talib. They were also very happy to pay the bill for such relief operations for three years, and all they sought in return was the safety of the besieged clans.

It should be pointed out here that the hatred and anger of the Umayyad clan of Quraysh was directed not against the Muslims but against the clan of Banu Hashim. Their aim was to destroy Islam. But they could not destroy Islam without killing Muhammad. They made numerous attempts to kill him but they failed because he was beyond their reach. He was safe and comfortable in the "fortress" which Abu Talib and the Banu Hashim had built for him.

The Umayyads rightly pinpointed the Banu Hashim as responsible for all their failures and frustrations in their war on Islam, and never condoned it for checkmating them in their long and bitter struggle against it.

As for the Muslims who did not belong to the clan of Banu Hashim, there were many, and they were all in Makkah. They did not go to Sh'ib Abu Talib with the Banu Hashim. Some among them are said to have been rich, powerful and influential, and all of them claimed that they loved their Prophet; but curiously, not one of them ever came to see him much less bring any aid to him, during the three years of siege. They enjoyed the comfort and security of their homes in the city for three years while their Prophet, Muhammad Mustafa, lived on the edge of a sword, surrounded by enemies thirsting for his blood, and in a state of unmitigated suspense never knowing what terrors the next day or the next night might bring to him and to his clan.

The siege of Banu Hashim was raised three years later in A.D. 619, and the clan returned to the city. Ten years had passed since Muhammad, may God bless him and his Ahlul-Bait, had first proclaimed his mission. The boycott of the Quraysh had failed to produce the intended result. The members of Banu Hashim were defiant, and their morale was high. It was just as unthinkable for them, at the end of the siege, as it had been at the beginning, to surrender Muhammad, their darling, to his enemies.

Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib returned to their homes in Makkah after three years. During these three years, the vast fortunes of Khadija and Abu Talib had run out. They had to make, as it were, a new beginning in life, by putting their blocks into place – one by one.

If the leaders of the Quraysh abandoned the siege, it was not because there was any "change of heart" on their part. They abandoned the siege because there were other forces at work against it. Following is the

account given in the earliest extant authority, the biography of the Prophet of Islam by Muhammad ibn Ishaq, of the events which culminated in the return to Makkah of the clans of Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib from Sh'ib Abu Talib, after three years of exile.

The Annulling of the Boycott

"The Banu Hashim and the Banu al-Muttalib were in the Shi'b (mountain hideout) as the Quraysh had made a covenant to ostracize them. Then some members of the Quraysh itself took steps to annul the boycott against them. None took more trouble in this than Hisham Bin Amr … for the reason that he was the son of a brother to Nadla b. Hashim b. Abd Manaf by his mother and was closely attached to the Banu Hashim. He was highly esteemed by his people. I have heard that when these two clans were in their Shi'b, he used to bring a camel laden with food by night and then, when he had got it to the mouth of the alley, he took off its halter, gave it a whack on the side, and sent it running into the alley to them. He would do the same thing another time, bringing clothes for them.

He went to Zuhayr B. Abu Umayya B. Al-Mughira whose mother was Atika daughter of Abdul Muttalib, and said: 'Are you content to eat food and wear clothes while you know of the condition of your maternal uncles? They cannot buy or sell or inter-marry. By God, if they were the uncles of Abu'l-Hakam b. Hisham (Abu Jahl), and you asked him to do what he has asked you to do, he would never agree to it.' He (Zuhayr) said, 'Confound you, Hisham, what can I do? I am only one man. By God, if I had another man to back me, I would soon annul it.' He said, 'I have found a man – myself.' 'Find another,' said he. So Hisham went to Al-Mutim B. Adiy and said, 'Are you content that two clans of Banu Abd Manaf should perish while you look on consenting to follow Quraysh? You will find that they will soon do the same with you.' He (Mutim) made the same reply as Zuhayr and demanded a fourth man.

So Hisham went to Abu'l Bukhtari B. Hisham who asked for a fifth man, and then to Zama'a B. Al-Aswad B. Al-Muttalib, who asked for a sixth man, and reminded him of their kinship and duties. He asked whether others were willing to cooperate in this task. He gave him the names of the others. They all agreed to meet at night near Hujun, above Makkah, and when they did, they bound themselves to take up the question of the document until they had secured its annulment.

On the following day, when people got together, Zuhayr put on a robe, went round the Kaaba seven times; then came forward and said: ‘O people of Mecca, are we to eat and clothe ourselves while the Banu Hashim perish, unable to buy or sell? By God, I will not rest until this evil boycotting document is torn up!

Abu Jahl shouted: ‘You lie. It shall not be torn up.'

Zama'a said: "You are a greater liar; we did not want this document even when it was first drafted and signed. Abu'l Bukhtari said, ‘Zama'a is right. We were not satisfied with this document when it was written, and we are not satisfied with it now.'

Al-Mutim added: "You are both right, and anyone who says otherwise, is a liar. We take Allah to witness that we dissociate ourselves from the whole idea and what is written in the document." Hisham spoke in the same sense, and supported his friends.

Then al-Mutim went up to the document to tear it in pieces. He found that worms had already eaten it except the words, "In Thy Name O Allah." This was the customary formula of the Quraysh to begin their writing. The writer of the deed was Mansur b. Ikrima."

Mutim ibn Adiy tore the infamous document of the Quraysh into pieces. Those pieces were blown away by the wind, and no vestige was left of them. It was an act that called for conviction and courage – conviction that Banu Hashim were the innocent victims of iniquity, hostility and attrition; and courage to defy the Quraysh. His resolute act was the signal that the siege of Banu Hashim was over, and that its members could now return to the city. Mutim himself and the young warriors of his clan rode in full battle-dress into the ravine and escorted Muhammad Mustafa and all members of the two clans of Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib, back into Makkah and into their homes.

Dr. Muhamed Hamidullah writes on page 10 of his book, Introduction to Islam, published by the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, Salimiah, Kuwait (1977):

After three years, four or five non-Muslims, more humane than the rest and belonging to different clans, proclaimed publicly their denunciation of the unjust boycott.

Dr. Hamidullah has attributed the failure of the boycott to the humanity of "four or five non-Muslims. They were, he says, "more humane than the rest." He is right. But were they more humane even than the Muslims who were living in Makkah?

Astoundingly, incredibly, the answer to this uncomfortable question is in the affirmative. After all, apart from these five paladins – all non-Muslims – humanity did not impel anyone else in Makkah – non-Muslim or Muslim – to defy the Quraysh and to act in defense of the Banu Hashim.

There is one more question, viz., why did Zuhayr consider himself alone?

When Hisham first broached the subject of annulling the Agreement of the polytheists to boycott the Banu Hashim, to his friend, Zuhayr, and taunted him for being insensitive to the sufferings of Banu Hashim, and for his failure to act to bring that suffering to an end, the latter said, "Confound you, Hisham, what can I do? I am only one man. By God, if I had another man to back me, I would soon annul it."

Zuhayr's answer is cryptic. Why did he consider himself alone? Why did he not make any attempt to enlist the support of the Muslims of whom there were many in Makkah? According to the historians, some of the Muslims in Makkah were men of rank and substance, and had considerable clout with the polytheists. But for some mysterious reason, it did not occur either to Zuhayr himself or to any of his friends, to recruit these Muslims into the "team" which brought the long siege of Banu Hashim to an end.

Zuhayr and his friends were successful in their efforts to bring the Banu Hashim back into the city. But by their action, they had demonstrated that the Muslims who were living in Makkah, were not "indispensable" for Muhammad or for Islam.

It is one of the supreme paradoxes of the history of Islam that the hand that reached out and tore into shreds, the covenant of the infidels to

isolate and to ostracize the clan of Banu Hashim, belonged, not to a "believer" but to an "unbeliever" Mutim ibn Adiy! Neither Mutim nor any of his four friends, viz., Hisham ibn Amr, Zuhayr b. Abu Umayya, Abu'l Bukhtari b. Hisham, and Zama'a b. Al-Aswad, was a Muslim. But all five of them were high-minded paladins, and they did not acquiesce in the injustice being done to the Banu Hashim. They did not rest until they had restored justice in Makkah.

Technically, these five paladins were not Muslims. But they and they alone had the grit and the gumption to uphold a principle that is Islamic, viz., the Principle of Justice. They upheld justice, and by their heroic deed, won immortality for themselves in the saga of Islam.

The Muslims, on the other hand, not only did not act; they did not even protest against the cynicism and highhandedness of the Quraysh in Banushing the Banu Hashim from Makkah. They maintained, for three years, a discreet detachment and an unconvincing silence.Their deeds, apparently, were governed by prudence. Therefore, all that they did, was to temporize, and to watch the drift of events, like disinterested observers.

Chapter 15

The Deaths of Khadija and Abu Talib - A.D. 619

Thanks to the chivalry and gallantry of the five paladins of Makkah, the members of the clan of Banu Hashim could now live in their homes once again. But they had barely begun to recover from the rigors of living in a mountain hide-out for three years, when Khadija, the wife, the friend and the companion of Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, and the benefactress of Islam and the Muslims, fell ill and died. All her life she had lived in the midst of luxury and abundance but the three years of exile had been a time of excessive austerity for her which inevitably took its toll.

As noted before, Khadija was the very first woman in the whole world to declare that God was One, and Muhammad was His Messenger to all mankind. The honor and glory of being the First Believer in the whole world is hers to all eternity. She had sacrificed her comfort, her wealth, and her home for Islam; and now it would appear that she sacrificed her life also. Without a doubt, if she had lived in her spacious and luxurious house in Makkah, surrounded by her maid-servants, she might have lived for many more years. But she preferred to stand by her husband and his clan, and to share the bitters of life with them. During the siege, she had to endure not only the pangs of hunger and thirst but also the extremes of heat in summer and cold in winter, and yet no one ever heard a word of gripe from her, and she never lost her serenity. Whether times were good or bad, whether she had abundance or she had nothing, she was always cheerful. She was cheerful even in exile. Privation and austerity never soured her temperament. It was her temperament that was an unfailing source of strength, comfort and courage for her husband during the bleakest moments of his life.

During the years of the siege, Khadija spent her immense fortune on buying essentials like water, food and clothing for the clan of her husband. When she returned to her house, her last cent was gone; and when she died, there was not enough money in the house to buy a shroud. A

cloak of her husband was used as a shroud for her, and she was given burial in it.

Muhammad Mustafa never married another woman as long as Khadija lived, and if she had not died, it is most probable that he would not have married any other woman.

Edward Gibbon

During the 24 years of their marriage, Khadija's youthful husband abstained from the right of polygamy, and the pride or tenderness of the venerable matron was never insulted by the society of a rival. After her death, the Prophet placed her in the rank of four perfect women, with the sister of Moses, the mother of Jesus, and Fatima, the best beloved of his daughters. (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

Sir John Glubb

Khadija was Mohammed's first convert. From the moment of his first call, until her death nine years later, she never faltered. Whenever he encountered mockery or contradiction, he was sure, when he returned home in the evening, to find a cheerful and loving comforter. She was always ready by her confident equanimity to restore his courage and to lighten the burden of his fears. (The Life and Times of Mohammed, New York, 1970)

Ibn Ishaq, the biographer of the Prophet, says that when there was resumption of Divine revelation after its cessation following the first revelation, Khadija received a Divine tribute and a salutation of peace from God. The message was communicated to Muhammad by Gabriel, and when he conveyed it to Khadija, she said: "God is Peace (as-Salam), and from Him is all Peace, and may peace be on Gabriel."

Muhammad Mustafa forever remembered Khadija with love, affection and gratitude. During her brief illness, he kept a night-long vigil, nursing her, comforting her and praying for her. He told her that God had built for her a palace of pearls in Paradise. Her death filled his heart with deep sorrow.

Khadija died on the 10th of Ramadan of the 10th year of the Proclamation of Islam. She was buried in Hujun above Makkah. After the burial, the Apostle himself smoothed the earth on her grave.

One month after the death of Khadija, the Prophet sustained another shock in the death of Abu Talib, his uncle and guardian. Abu Talib was the bulwark of Islam since its birth. The death of these two friends, Khadija and Abu Talib, was the greatest shock and sorrow that he had to endure in the fifty years of his life. He called the year of their death "The Year of Sorrow."

The year 619 turned out to be a year of sorrow for Muhammad Mustafa in more than one sense. The death of one's loved ones is naturally a cause for sorrow. But in his case, the death of these two friends was not merely a subjective experience. He was soon made conscious of the meaning of their death by a series of extraneous events.

Ibn Ishaq

Khadija and Abu Talib died in the same year, and with Khadija's death troubles followed fast on each other's heels, for she had been a faithful supporter to him in Islam, and he used to tell her of his troubles. With the death of Abu Talib, he lost a strength and stay in his personal life and a defense and protection against his tribe. Abu Talib died some three years before he (Mohammed) migrated to Medina, and it was then that Quraysh began to treat him in an offensive way which they would not have dared to follow in his uncle's lifetime. A young lout actually threw dust on his head.

Hisham on the authority of his father, Urwa, told me that the Prophet went into his house, and he was saying, "Quraysh never treated me thus while Abu Talib was alive." (The Life of the Messenger of God)

Washington Irving

Mohammed soon became sensible of the loss he had sustained in the death of Abu Talib who had been not merely an affectionate relative, but a steadfast and powerful protector, from his great influence in Mecca. At his death there was no one to check and counteract the hostilities of Abu Sofian and Abu Jahl.

The fortunes of Mohammed were becoming darker and darker in his native place. Khadija, his original benefactress, the devoted companion of his solitude and seclusion, the zealous believer in his doctrine, was dead; so also was Abu Talib, once his faithful and efficient protector. Deprived of the sheltering influence of the latter, Mohammed had become, in a manner, an outlaw in Mecca, obliged to conceal himself and remain a burden on the hospitality of those whom his own doctrines had involved in persecution (sic). If worldly advantage had been his objective, how had it been attained? (Life of Mohammed)

In stating that Muhammad had become "a burden on the hospitality of those whom his own doctrines had involved in persecution," the historian quoted above, has expressed an opinion with which we cannot agree. Muhammad was never a burden to anyone at any time. The members of his clan, the Banu Hashim, considered it a privilege and an honor to protect and to defend him against his enemies.

Sir William Muir

The sacrifices to which Abu Talib exposed himself and his family for the sake of his nephew, while yet incredulous of his mission (sic), stamp his character as singularly noble and unselfish. They afford at the same time strong proof of the sincerity of Mohammed. Abu Talib would not have acted thus for an interested deceiver; and he had ample means of scrutiny.

When the Patriarch felt that life was ebbing, he summoned his brethren, the sons of Abd al-Muttalib, around his bed, commended his nephew to their protection; and, relieved of the trust, died in peace, and was buried not far from Khadija's grave. Mohammed wept bitterly for his uncle; and not without reason. For forty years he had been his faithful friend - the prop of his childhood, the guardian of his youth, and in later life a tower of defense. His very unbelief (sic) made his influence stronger. So long as he survived, Mohammed needed not to fear violence or attack. But there was no strong hand now to protect him from his foes. A second Khadija might be found, but not a second Abu Talib. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

Sir John Glubb

The Apostle made great efforts to persuade Abu Talib to repeat the Muslim witness of faith, but he only lay silent making no response, until he passed away (sic). Abu Talib seems to us an attractive character. Outspoken, loyal and sympathetic, he endured many worries, losses and contradictions in order to protect his nephew, although he did not believe in his preaching (sic). He is not considered a hero by Muslims, for he died in unbelief (sic). Nevertheless, if it had not been for the staunch courage with which he stood by his nephew, Islam might have died in its cradle. (The Life and Times of Mohammed, New York, 1970)

I have quoted above Sir William Muir and Sir John Glubb verbatim. They have insinuated that Abu Talib died in unbelief. If challenged to produce authority for such a statement, they would advert to Bukhari. Bukhari says that when Abu Talib was on his death-bed, the Apostle urged him to become a Muslim but he said that doing so would embarrass him with his Qurayshi friends.

The author(s) of this "tradition" forgot one thing. Abu Talib was dying, and knew that he was not going to see his Qurayshi "friends" any more. He knew that he was going into the presence of his Creator. At a moment like this he could not have cared less for the Quraysh. His anxiety at all times was to win the pleasure of God, and he proved by his deeds more than anyone else could ever prove by his words, that his faith in

the Oneness of God, and in the mission of Muhammad as His Messenger, was rocklike and unshakable.

Abu Talib was a fervent believer in Islam. His attachment to Islam is pointed up by his consistency, and by the logic of facts.

No man can love Muhammad and idolatry at the same time; the two loves are mutually exclusive. And no man can love Muhammad yet hate Islam. The love of Muhammad and the hatred of Islam cannot coexist. Whoever loves Muhammad, must, inevitably, love Islam. Nor can anyone hate Muhammad and love Islam. Such a postulate would be a monstrous absurdity.

If there is any one thing beyond any doubt in the history of Islam, it is the love of Abu Talib for Muhammad. As noted before, Abu Talib and his wife, Fatima bint Asad, loved Muhammad more than they loved their own children. Both husband and wife were ever ready to sacrifice their sons for Muhammad. Such love could have had only one fountainhead, that of faith in Muhammad and Islam. Abu Talib's wife, Fatima bint Asad, the foster-mother of Muhammad, was the second woman to accept Islam, the first being Khadija.

Abu Talib was proud that God had chosen Muhammad, the son of his brother, Abdullah, in all creation, to be His Last Messenger to mankind. Muhammad was the greatest love and the greatest pride of his uncle, Abu Talib.

The glorious deeds of Abu Talib are an integral part of the story of Islam. No story of Islam would either be complete or true if it did not comprehend an account of his role, as the protector of Muhammad and the defender of Islam. His deeds are the most eloquent testimony of his faith in Allah and His Messenger.

May Allah bless His devout slaves, Khadija; Abu Talib and his wife, Fatima bint Asad. All three of them were the "instruments" through which He consolidated Islam, and made it viable.

Chapter 16

Muhammad's Visit to Ta'if

More than ten years had passed since Muhammad, may God bless him and his Ahlul-Bait, had first begun to preach Islam. His success in these ten years had been rather modest, limited as it was to the conversion of fewer than 170 men and women in Makkah. But after the death of his wife, Khadija, and his uncle, Abu Talib, it appeared that the Quraysh would wrest even that limited success from his hands. Makkah had proved inhospitable to Islam and it occurred to the Prophet that he ought, perhaps to try to preach the new faith in some other city. The nearest city was Ta'if, 70 miles in the south-east of Makkah, and he went there in late 619. Zayd bin Haritha went with him.

In Ta'if, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, called on the three chiefs of the local tribes, and invited them to abandon their gross idolatry, to acknowledge the Oneness of God, to repudiate man-made distinctions of high and low, and to believe in the equality and brotherhood of all men.

The chiefs of Ta'if were a conceited and arrogant crew, and they did not want even to listen to Muhammad. They greeted him with mockery and ridicule and set upon him the idlers and the louts of the city. They pelted him and Zayd with clods and rocks. Wounded and covered with blood, Muhammad staggered out of Ta'if. Once he was outside the city walls, he almost collapsed but a certain gardener took him into his hut, dressed his wounds, and let him rest and recuperate until he felt strong enough to resume his journey across the rough terrain between Ta'if and Makkah.

But when Muhammad arrived in the environs of Makkah, he sensed that he could not reenter his native city now that his uncle, Abu Talib,

was not there to protect him. Pagan hostility toward him had reached the flash point. He realized that if he entered Makkah, he would be killed

Muhammad could not enter his hometown, and there was no other place to go to. What was he to do?

In this extremity, Muhammad sent word to three nobles in the city asking each of them to take him under his protection. Two of them refused but the third one – the gallant Mutim ibn Adiy – responded to his signal of distress. It was the same Mutim who had, earlier, flouted the chiefs of Quraysh by tearing into pieces their covenant to boycott the Banu Hashim, and had brought the two clans of Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib from the Sh'ib Abu Talib back into the city.

Mutim ordered his sons, nephews and other young men of his clan to put on their battle-dress. He then marched, in full panoply of war, at their head, out of the city. He brought Muhammad Mustafa with him, first into the precincts of the Kaaba where the latter made the customary seven circuits, and then escorted him to his home.

Abd-al-Rahman 'Azzam

None of the Makkan chieftains from whom Muhammad requested protection for safe entry into the city would extend him help; but a good-hearted pagan chief, al-Mut'im ibn-'Adi, took him under his protection and brought him home. Thus did Muhammad re-enter Makkah - guarded by a polytheist! (The Eternal Message of Muhammad, published by the New English Library, London, 1964)

Sir John Glubb

In Taif the Prophet was stoned and chased. Afraid to return to Mecca now that he no longer enjoyed the protection of Abu Talib, he sent a message to several leading idolaters, asking their protection. Two refused but eventually Mutim ibn Adi, chief of the Nofal clan of Quraysh, agreed to protect him. Next morning, he, his sons and nephews went fully armed to the public square of the Kaaba, and announced that Mohammed was under their protection. The protection of Mutim ibn Adi enabled the Apostle to return to Mecca. (The Life and Times of Mohammed, New York, 1970)

The application of Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of God, upon his return from Ta'if, to Mutim ibn Adiy, a non-Muslim, seeking his protection, raises once again, a most uncomfortable question, in a most pointed manner, on the attitude and conduct of the Muslims. Why didn't the Apostle ask any of them to take him under his protection even though some of them were said to have been rich and influential, and some others were touted to have been the terror of the pagans? Why is it that the Apostle sought the protection of a non-Muslim but didn't condescend even to inform the Muslims that he wanted to reenter Makkah and was in need of protection?

Or another question! Why didn't the Muslims themselves go to the city gate and escort their Prophet to his home? Here they had a splendid opportunity to demonstrate to him that they were worthy of his trust even if he had considered them unworthy. But they missed the opportunity. They did not do anything that would show that they had any anxiety for his personal safety.

Pagan Arabia, however, was not devoid of its share of chivalry and heroism. These qualities were personified in Mutim ibn Adiy, Abul Bukhtari and a few others. They were the knights of Arabia, and it was their chivalry that was to make their country famous in later centuries. Pagan Arabia never produced nobler figures than these. Even Muslims ought to acknowledge their debt of gratitude to them. After all it were they who dared the Quraysh in some of the most critical moments of the life of the Prophet of Islam. In doing so, they were inspired only by their own ideals of chivalry. They considered it their duty to defend the defenseless.

The failure at Ta'if was utterly heart-breaking for the Prophet, and he knew that but for the heroic intervention of Mutim ibn Adiy, he might not have been able to enter Makkah at all. To a casual observer it might appear that the Prophet had reached the limits of human endurance and patience. The progress of Islam had come to a standstill, and the outlook for the future could not look bleaker.

But did Muhammad give way to despair in the face of persistent failures and in the face of violent confrontations with the polytheists? It would only be natural if he did. But he did not. He never despaired of

God's boundless mercy. He knew that he was doing God's work, and he had no doubt at all that He would lead him out of the wilderness of hopelessness and helplessness to the destination of success and felicity.

It was in one of the darkest and most dismal moments in his life that Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, was elevated by God to the highest heavens, perhaps in recognition of his refusal to accept defeat and failure in the line of duty. God honored His Messenger with Isra' and Me'raj. Isra' is his nocturnal journey from "the Sacred Mosque" to "the Distant Mosque" (Masjid el-Aqsa); and Me'raj is his ascension to the Heaven. Isra' and Me'raj foreshadowed the great and the historic events that already loomed over the horizons, though at the moment there was no way to perceive them.

The mystic meaning of Me'raj refers to the constant struggle of the individual soul against evil. It has its setbacks and failures. But if it is true to itself, and is true to Faith in God, He will give it victory against evil.

The story of Me'raj, therefore, is a fitting prelude to the journey of the human soul through life. The first step on this journey is to be taken through moral conduct – a sense of personal responsibility for the welfare of fellow human beings, service to God through service to His creation, and an awareness of His presence with us at all times.

Isra' is referred to in the first verse of the 17th chapter of Al-Qur'an al-Majid as follows:

Glory to God who did take His slave for a journey by night from the sacred mosque to the farthest mosque whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our signs: for He is One who heareth and seeth all things.

Isra' and Me'raj took place on the night of the 27th of Rajab (the seventh month of the Islamic calendar) of the twelfth year of the Proclamation, i.e., one year before the Migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Medina.

Chapter 17

The New Horizons of Islam

Yathrib was a town in an oasis about 250 miles in the north of Makkah. In A.D. 620, six Yathribites visited Makkah for pilgrimage. A fortuitous meeting with Muhammad led to their conversion to Islam. They told him that they had left Yathrib in a state of simmer and that it could erupt anytime into warfare. But they expressed the hope that God would restore peace to their city through His Messenger. They also promised to return to Makkah and to meet him in the following year.

This was the beginning of Islam in Yathrib.

When these six new Muslims returned to Yathrib, they talked with their folks and friends about Islam, and found them willing, even eager to listen. A year later, when the season of pilgrimage arrived, twelve citizens of Yathrib, including the original six, visited Makkah. Among them there were two women also. They met the Apostle of God at Aqaba. He briefed them on the Articles of Faith in Islam, and all of them accepted Islam. At the same time, they also gave him their pledge of loyalty. This is called the First Pledge of Aqaba.

These Muslims solemnly assured the Apostle of God that:
they would never associate partners with Allah,
they would not worship anyone except Him;
they would never rob or steal;
they would never kill their female infants;
they would never revile others;
they would never defame women;
they would always be chaste and pure;
they would obey Allah and His Apostle;
and they would be faithful to him at all times.

The neophytes requested the Apostle of God to send some teacher with them to Yathrib to teach them Qur’an and the precepts of Islam. He sent Mas'ab ibn Umayr, one of his uncles (Mas'ab was the cousin of his father), with the group to propagate Islam in Yathrib. Mas'ab's mission was successful, and many families in Yathrib accepted Islam.

This was the first time that Muhammad Mustafa had chosen an official. Professor Margoliouth says that Mas'ab ibn Umayr was the first choice of an official in Islam.

The Second Pledge of Aqaba

In A.D. 622, seventy-five citizens of Yathrib came to Makkah in the season of the pilgrimage. The Apostle gave them audience at the same spot at Aqaba where he had met the group of twelve the year before. These 75 men and women also accepted Islam. They gave him their pledge of loyalty, and invited him to Yathrib.

The Apostle's uncle, Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib, was with him on this occasion. He is reported to have said to the "hosts" from Yathrib: "Muhammad is held in high esteem by his own people. If you can stand by him through thick and thin, take him with you to Yathrib; if not, then abandon the whole idea."

One of the leaders of the Yathribites was Bera'a ibn Ma'roor. He said: "When we were children, our favorite toys were swords and spears." Another chief, Abul Haithum, interrupted him, and said: "O Messenger of God! What will happen when Islam becomes great and strong? Will you then leave Yathrib and return to Makkah?"

Muhammad Mustafa smiled and said: "No. Your blood is my blood and my blood is your blood. From this day you are mine and I am yours, and I shall never part company with you."

The Yathribite Muslims were satisfied by the assurance given to them by Muhammad Mustafa, and they returned to Yathrib to spread Islam among their folks. Islam began to make steady progress in Yathrib. When it appeared that the new faith had found a haven in that city, the Apostle suggested to the victims of persecution in Makkah to emigrate there. Following his suggestion, Muslims began to leave Makkah, in small groups, and to settle in their new homes in Yathrib.

The Second Pledge of Aqaba is a landmark in the history of Islam. It was the "anchor" on which the frail vessel of Islam came to rest at last, after being buffeted for thirteen years in the turbulent seas of paganism in Arabia.

Chapter 18

The Hijra (Migration)

When most of the Muslims left Makkah and settled in Yathrib, it occurred to the idolaters that if Islam struck roots in the oasis in their north, and became viable, it would pose a threat to their commercial interests in Syria. They saw Islam as a new "peril" rearing its head in the north. They, therefore, convened a meeting in their city hall at which they considered the most effective way of forestalling this "peril." After some debate, they agreed, by consensus, that the only way of averting this new peril, was by killing its author – Muhammad himself – while he was still in Makkah. This decision raised a few other questions such as who would kill him, how, when and where. They further debated these questions, considered numerous options, and finally decided, again by consensus, that one warrior from each clan of each tribe living in Makkah and its environs, would be selected; all of them would attack the house of Muhammad simultaneously, and would kill him, just before dawn of the following day. Such concerted action, they felt confident, would "immobilize" the Banu Hashim who would be unable to fight against all the clans at the same time in retaliation for the murder of Muhammad.

The Prophet, however, was ready to meet an exigency like this. Apprised in time of the plan of the Quraysh to kill him, by a secret convert, he called his devoted cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, disclosed to him the plan of the Quraysh, and his own plan to outwit them. His plan was to put Ali in his own bed, and then to slip out of the house at an opportune moment. The Quraysh, seeing Ali covered in a mantle, would imagine that Muhammad was sleeping, he explained. He also asked Ali to restore all the deposits of the pagans to their owners, and then to leave Makkah and to meet him in Yathrib. Ali understood everything, and the Apostle commended him to God's protection.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

The young men whom the Quraysh had prepared for performing Muhammad's assassination had blockaded his house during the night lest he ran away. On the night of the Hijrah, Muhammad confided his plan to Ali ibn Abi Talib and asked him to cover himself with the Prophet's green mantle, and to sleep in the Prophet's bed. He further asked him to stay in Makkah until he had returned all valuables deposited with Muhammad to their owners. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Marmaduke Pickthall

The slayers were before his (Muhammad's) house. He gave his cloak to Ali, bidding him lie down on the bed so that anyone looking in might think Muhammad lay there. (Introduction to the Translation of Holy Qur'an, Lahore, 1975)

The polytheists surrounded the house of Muhammad. They peeked inside and beheld a recumbent figure covered in a blanket, and were satisfied that their "quarry" was safe. The opportune moment for the Apostle to escape came sometime after midnight when the pickets had dozed off. He silently walked through them and out of the precincts of his house.

The pagan pickets had been caught off-guard, and the Apostle of God had succeeded in eluding their surveillance!

Ali slept in the bed of the Prophet all night. Just before daybreak, the pagan head-hunters stormed into the house with drawn sabers to kill the Prophet. But their surprise and dismay knew no bounds when they noticed that it was Ali and not Muhammad who was sleeping in the bed. They seized Ali for questioning and possibly for torture. But the captain of the pickets told them that Muhammad could not have gone too far, and that they might still catch him if they did not waste precious time in questioning Ali whereupon they released him. This event is celebrated in the history of Islam as Hijra or Migration.

M. Shibli, the famous Indian historian of Islam, writes in his biography of the Messenger of God:

… the pagans of Makkah hated Muhammad, yet they trusted him. Whoever had any valuables, he brought them and deposited them with him. He was their "banker." He knew about the plans of the Quraysh to kill him. He, therefore, called Ali, and said: "Allah has ordered me to go to Yathrib. You sleep in my bed and tomorrow return all the deposits of the Makkans to them." This was a situation fraught with the gravest danger. Ali also knew that Quraysh had resolved to kill the Apostle of God that night, and that to sleep in his bed was to sleep in the jaws of death. But when was Ali ever afraid of death? The conqueror of Khyber slept in the jaws of death so soundly as he had never slept in all his life. (Life of the Apostle of God, Azamgarh, India, 1976)

The Apostle did not have time to explain to Ali in detail how many deposits he had and to whom they were to be turned over. It was enough for him to tell Ali to return all the deposits to their (pagan) owners, and he (Ali) did. It was just like the Feast of Dhul-'Asheera when all that the Apostle had to do, was to ask Ali to invite to dinner the elders of the clan of Banu Hashim. No detailed instructions were necessary. Ali instinctively understood what his master expected from him. Being entrusted to restore the deposits of the Makkans to them, is proof that Ali was the confidante and the "private secretary" of the Prophet of Islam even before the Migration to Yathrib.

If Hijra highlights Ali's unquestioning loyalty to his master, Muhammad, it also demonstrates his incredible courage. The pickets of the enemy might have killed him either believing that he was Muhammad, or upon the discovery that he was not, out of sheer frustration. He understood this perfectly, but for him no risk was too great if he could save the life of the Apostle of God. It was this devotion and this courage that won for him the accolades of Al-Qur'an al-Majid. Qur'an has paid tribute to his loyalty and his daring which he displayed on the fateful night of Hijra (Migration) as follows:

And among men there is one who sells his life to win the pleasure of Allah. Allah is very kind to His devotees. (Chapter 2; verse 207)

Razi, the famous commentator of Qur'an, says in his Tafsir Kabir (vol. II, page 189) that this verse was expressly revealed in recognition of Ali's great and glorious service on the night of Hijra when he made it possible

for Muhammad, the Apostle of God, to leave Makkah. Because of Ali, he could leave in safety.

On that historic night, a strange and a mysterious business transaction took place, the first and the last of its kind in the entire history of Creation. It was a sale-and-purchase transaction between Allah and one of His slaves. The slave in question was Ali ibn Abi Talib.

On a silent and moonless night, Allah came into the "market" as a "Customer." He came to buy a certain commodity. His slave, Ali, came into the "market" as a "merchant." His mission: to sell the commodity that Allah was seeking. The "commodity" was his soul, his life!

Allah, the "Customer," contemplated the quality of the "commodity," and found it superb. He, therefore, decided to buy it on the spot. He paid the "price" to the "merchant," and the "commodity" changed hands, same as in any other business transaction. From that moment, the "commodity" – Ali's life – ceased to be his, and became the peculiar property of Allah. The sale and purchase transaction between Master and slave was thus completed, to the entire satisfaction of both parties.

There were "witnesses" too of this transaction. They were the angels and the stars – myriad's of them – watching from their celestial "galleries." They beheld in silent amazement and silent admiration as Ali sold his life to Allah. Al-Qur'an al-Majid became their "spokesman" to the mortals on this earth, and recorded what they – the witnesses – observed on that memorable night.

The "record" of this transaction, as preserved by Qur'an, is now with us, and it is imperishable and indestructible. It will last on this earth as long as those angels and the stars – "the witnesses" of the transaction – will last in Heaven!

Ali had sold the "merchandise" to Allah. Now freed from "anxiety" for the safety of that "merchandise," he could sleep, and he went to sleep – in the bed of Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of Allah. On that Night of Destiny, he slept himself into immortality. At dawn, when he woke up, or rather, when he was awakened by the clangor and rattle of the spears and the swords of the head-hunters, sent by Quraysh, to kill Muhammad, he had become immortal!

Out of all His slaves, Allah selected Ali to carry out His Plan. That Plan was to protect His Messenger, from his enemies. The latter had worked out a plan for the destruction of Islam. They believed that if they killed Muhammad, Islam would be destroyed. They, therefore, planned and conspired to kill Muhammad. But they didn't know that Allah had a plan of His own – a Counter-Plan – ready for this occasion. It was Allah's Counter-Plan that was going to checkmate the Quraysh by saving the life of His Apostle. The Qur'anic reference to Allah's Counter-Plan occurs in the following verse:

And (the unbelievers) plotted and planned, and Allah too planned, and the best of planners is Allah. (Chapter 3; verse 54)

Ali ibn Abi Talib was the "key component" in the Counter-Plan of Allah. Ali's role guaranteed the success of the Hijra (Migration) of Muhammad, and the success of Hijra alone made the birth of the political state of Medina possible. If Hijra had failed, the State of Medina would never have come into existence. The State of Medina was the physical apparatus of the first and the last Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Allah made His slave, Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Instrument through which He put that Kingdom on this earth.

When Muhammad was out of the perimeter of his house, he went to the house of Abu Bakr, and told him that God had ordered him to leave Makkah that same night. Since they had no time to linger, they immediately left the city, and went to a cave called Thaur in the south of Makkah. They reached the cave and entered it while it was still dark.

They were hiding in the cave when, a few hours later, the head-hunters also arrived in their pursuit. According to tradition, a spider had spun its web across the entrance to the cave, and a bird had laid an egg at it. The head-hunters argued that if anyone had entered the cave, the web and the egg would be broken, but since both were intact, no one had entered it. Thus convinced that the fugitives were not in the cave, they gave up the hunt and returned to Makkah.

While the head-hunters were debating the point whether or not they should enter the cave to capture the fugitives who might be hiding in it, Abu Bakr was seized with panic, and he said to the Apostle: "We are

only two and our enemies are so many. What chance we have of saving our lives if they enter the cave?" The latter said: "No. We are not two. There is a Third One with us, and He is Allah." This incident has been referred to in Al-Qur'an al-Majid as follows:

And God helped His Apostle when the unbelievers banished him. And when they were in the cave, he said to the second of the two: "do not be grief-stricken. God is with us." And God bestowed His peace upon him (upon His Apostle) (Chapter 9; verse 40)

The Apostle and Abu Bakr spent three days in the cave. In Makkah, during this time, interest in capturing the Apostle had waned. On the fourth day, Abdullah, the son of Abu Bakr, brought two camels with him for them to ride. Abu Bakr offered one of the camels to the Apostle but he refused to accept it as a gift, and paid its price before riding it. He and Abu Bakr then mounted these camels, and skirting Makkah to the north and east, they rode toward Yathrib in the north.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

When Abu Bakr brought two camels to the Apostle, he offered the better one to him and invited him to ride her. But the Apostle refused to ride an animal which was not his own, and when Abu Bakr wanted to give him it, he demanded to know what he had paid for it, and bought it from him. (Life of the Messenger of God)

The two travelers covered the distance between Makkah and Yathrib in nine days, and on the tenth day arrived in Quba, a place two miles south of Yathrib where they stayed in the house of Kulthum bin Hind, as his guests. The Apostle decided to await the arrival of Ali from Makkah before entering Yathrib. In the meantime, he laid the foundations of a mosque in Quba. It was a rough structure the completion of which is said to have taken fourteen days.

The Messenger of God arrived in Quba on Monday. On Thursday, Ali also arrived. He had returned the cash, the jewelry, the documents and other valuables of the Makkans to them. His master was thrilled to see him, and thanked God Who had brought him safely out of Makkah.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

Ali stayed in Makkah for three days and nights until he had restored the deposits which the Apostle held. This done, he joined the Apostle, and stayed with him in Kulthum's house.(The Life of the Messenger of God)

S. Margoliouth

On Monday the 8th of Rabi-I of the year 1 A.H., corresponding to September 20 of the year A.D. 622, the Prophet reached Kuba, now a great place for gardens and orchards. Hospitality was offered by an aged convert, Kulthum son of Hind, the name of whose slave "Success" seemed to the Prophet of good augury (Isabah, iii, 1138). It was accepted, though for receptions the house of another convert was found to be more convenient. At Kuba the Prophet determined to remain until Ali joined him which happened on the Thursday; with him was Suhaib ibn Sinan, who had been forced to hand over his savings to the Koreish. On the Friday, the Prophet rode from Kuba towards Yathrib, and is said to have performed service in the Wadi Ra'unah.(Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

The route was lined with merry multitudes of the Yathribites who were wearing their best holiday clothes. Women and children were singing songs of welcome from the rooftops of their houses. It was a scene that could hardly have been invented in fantasy. Muhammad, the Apostle of God, must have been deeply moved by such a reception.

Every (Arab) citizen of Yathrib was eager to become the host of the Prophet of Islam who was entering his city as a guest. But not wishing to disappoint even the humblest citizen, he dropped the reins of his she-camel, and declared that he would stay wherever she would halt. The she-camel ambled past many houses, and then halted in front of the house of Abu Ayyub, whereupon he became the proud host of the Apostle of God. Abu Ayyub was a distinguished citizen of Yathrib, and belonged to the clan of Banu Najjar. Both Amina, the mother of the Apostle, and the mother of his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, had belonged to this clan.

Chapter 19

The First Year of Hijra

According to the investigations of the late Mahmood Pasha al-Falaki of Egypt, the day when Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, arrived in Quba was Monday, 8th of Rabi-I of the year 13 of the Proclamation, a date which corresponds to September 20, 622.

On the following Friday, 12th of Rabi-I (September 24), the Messenger of God left Quba, and entered Yathrib. He was lodged at the house of Abu Ayyub, as already noted.

The Construction of the Mosque in Yathrib

The first act of Muhammad Mustafa, may God bless him and his Ahlul-Bait, upon arrival in Yathrib, was to build a mosque in which to worship Allah. In front of the house of Abu Ayyub there was a vacant lot which belonged to two orphans. The Apostle summoned them and their guardians, and told them that he wanted to buy that land. They told him that they would be very happy to make that land a gift to him. But he refused to accept it as a gift, and insisted on paying its price. They eventually agreed to accept payment for their land. Payment was made and ground-breaking was begun immediately.

Explaining the reasons why the Apostle of God did not accept the land as a gift, M. Abul Kalam Azad says in his book, Rasul-e-Rahmet (Messenger of Mercy), (Lahore, Pakistan, 1970):

The Apostle did not want to take anyone's obligation. Who can claim to be more faithful to him than Abu Bakr? And he himself said that he was more grateful to Abu Bakr for his moral and material support than to anyone else. And yet, when Abu Bakr wished to make a present to

him of a camel on the eve of their departure from Makkah to Yathrib, he did not accept it until he had paid Abu Bakr its price. Similarly, in Yathrib, when he wanted to buy land to build a mosque on it, its owners offered it to him as a gift. But he refused to accept it as a gift. The land was acquired only when its owners agreed to accept its price from him which he paid.

The mosque of Yathrib was the ultimate in simplicity of conception and design. The material used in its construction was unbaked bricks and mortar for the walls, and date fronds for the roof which was supported by trunks of palm trees. The alcove of the mosque pointed toward Jerusalem in the north. Each of the other three sides was pierced by a gate. The floor of the mosque had no covering at the beginning, not even a coarse matting. Two huts were also built on the outer wall, one for Sauda the daughter of Zama'a; and the other for Ayesha, the daughter of Abu Bakr, the two wives of the Prophet at the time. New huts were built for new wives as they came in later years. It was the first time when Muslims worked as a team in a community project. In the years to come, this team was to build the mighty edifice of Islam.

Inspired by the presence of the Messenger of God, everyone of the Companions was vying to outdo the others. Among the Companions was Ammar ibn Yasir, who, according to Ibn Ishaq, was the first man in Islam to build a mosque. Ibn Ishaq, did not specify which mosque it was that Ammar built. But Dr. Taha Husain of Egypt says that Ammar had built a mosque in Makkah itself and he prayed in it, long before he migrated to Yathrib.

When the mosque was being built, an incident took place which Ibn Ishaq has recorded as follows:

"Ammar b. Yasir came in when they had overloaded him with bricks, saying, "They are killing me. They load me with burdens they cannot carry themselves." Umm Salama, the Prophet's wife said: "I saw the Apostle run his hand through his (Ammar's) hair – for he was a curly-haired man – and say, "Alas, Ibn Sumayya! It is not they who will kill you, but a wicked band of men."

(This prophecy is said to have been fulfilled when Ammar was killed at Siffin – Suhayli, ii, p.3)

Ali composed a rajaz verse on that day (when the mosque was being built):

There’s one that labors night and day
To build us mosques of brick and clay
And one who turns from dust away.

Ammar learned it and began to chant it.

When he persisted in it, one of the Prophet's companions thought that it was he who was referred to in it, according to what Ziyad b. Abdullah el-Bakkai told me from Ibn Ishaq. The latter had actually named the man.

He said: "I have heard what you have been saying for a long time, O Ibn Sumayya, and by God I think, I will hit you on the nose!" Now he had a stick in his hand, and the Apostle was very angry and said: "What is wrong between them and Ammar? He invites them to Paradise while they invite him to hell. Ammar is as dear to me as my own face. If a man behaves like this he will not be forgiven, so avoid him."

Sufyan b. Uyana mentioned on the authority of Zakariya from al-Shabi that the first man to build a mosque was Ammar bin Yasir.

Suhayli says: Ibn Ishaq did name the man, but Ibn Hisham preferred not to do so, as not to mention one of the Prophet's companions in discreditable circumstances. Therefore it can never be right to inquire after his identity. Abu Dharr says: Ibn Ishaq did name the man and said, "This man was Uthman b. Affan." The Cairo editors say that in the Mawahib al-Laduniya, al-Qastallani, d. A.D. 1517, said that the man is said to be Uthman b. Mazun. This latter writer may safely be ignored on this point.) "

At the site of the construction of the mosque, one may witness a most touching scene in the story of the early days of Islam – Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, removing dust, with his own hands, from the head and the face of Ammar ibn Yasar. He did not honor any other companion with a sign of such affection, love and tenderness.

When the Apostle of God reproved his companions for meddling with Ammar, and said that he (Ammar) was inviting them to paradise whereas they were inviting him to hell, he (the Apostle) was, most probably,

paraphrasing the 41st verse of the 40^{th} chapter (Sura-tul-Momin) in Qur'an which reads as follows:

And o my people! How strange it is for me to call you to salvation while you call me to the fire.

Commenting upon this verse, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the translator of Al-Qur'an al-Majid, says:

It may seem strange according to the laws of this world that he should be seeking their good while they are seeking his damnation; but that is the merit of Faith.

The companion who tangled with Ammar ibn Yasir when the mosque of Yathrib was being built, was no one other than Uthman b. Affan, one of the future khalifas of the Muslims. He was squeamish about working in dust and mud, and getting his clothes soiled. When the Apostle of God showed him his displeasure, he had to keep quiet but the incident rankled in his heart, and he never forgot it. Many years later when he became khalifa, and found power in his hand, he ordered his slaves to knock down Ammar ibn Yasir and to beat him up – the man who was as dear to Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of God, as his (the Apostle's) own face.

The claim that it was not Uthman bin Affan but Uthman bin Mazun or somebody else who, by threatening Ammar ibn Yasir, roused the anger of the Apostle of God, is only an attempt at window-dressing by the "court" historians of later times.

At this time, Ammar ibn Yasir already enjoyed four distinctions which must have made him the envy of all the other companions of Muhammad, the Messenger of God.

They were:

1.He belonged to the First Muslim Family.

2.He was the son of the First and the Second Martyrs of Islam. His mother, Sumayya, was the first, and his father, Yasir, was the second martyr in Islam. It was an honor not attained by any other companion of Muhammad Mustafa.

3.He was the builder of the first mosque.

4.He was the beloved of Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of God.

May God bless Ammar ibn Yasir and his parents.

Adhan and Prayer

It was mandatory for Muslims to pray five times a day. They had to suspend their workaday activities, and to perform this duty. But there was no way to alert them that the time had come for praying.

According to the Sunni traditions, a companion suggested to the Prophet that a trumpet should be blown or a bell should be rung to alert Muslims before the time of each prayer. He did not accept this suggestion, as he said that he did not want to adopt the Jewish or Christian customs.

Abdullah bin Ziyad was a citizen of Yathrib. He came to see the Prophet, and said that while he was half-awake or half-asleep, a man appeared before him and told him that the human voice ought to be used to call the faithful to prayer; and he also taught him the Adhan (call to prayer), and the manner of saying it.

The Sunni historians say that the idea appealed to the Prophet, and he adopted it forthwith. He then called Bilal, taught him how to call the Muslims to prayer, and appointed him the first Muezzin (caller to prayer) of Islam.

These stories are discounted by the Shia Muslims. They say that just as Al-Qur'an al-Majid was revealed to Muhammad Mustafa, so was Adhan. They assert that the manner of calling the faithful to prayer could not be left to the dreams or reveries of some Arab. They further say that if the Apostle could teach Muslims how to perform lustrations, and how, when and what to say in each prayer, he could also teach them how and when to alert others before the time for each prayer.

According to the Shia traditions, the angel who taught the Messenger of God how to perform lustrations preparatory to prayers, and how to say the prayers, also taught him how to call others to prayer.

Yathrib Becomes Medina

The name "Yathrib" soon became obsolete. People began to call it "Medina-tun-Nabi," – the City of the Prophet. In due course, usage caused a contraction of this name to be adopted simply as "Medina" –

"the City," and that's what the name of the city of the Prophet of Islam has remained ever since.

The Groupings in Medina

When the Prophet and the refugees from Makkah arrived in Yathrib (now Medina), they found three Jewish tribes, viz., Quainuqa, Nadheer and Qurayza, and two Arab tribes, viz., Aus and Khazraj, living in that city.

E. A. Belyaev

The basic population of Medina consisted of its three Jewish tribes, the Quainuqa, the Quraiza and the Nadhir; and of the two Arab tribes, the Aus and the Khazraj. (Arabs, Islam and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages. 1969)

The Jews were farmers, merchants, traders, money-lenders, landlords and industrialists. They had grown rich through the practice of usury and they enjoyed a monopoly of the armaments industry in Arabia.

The two Arab tribes of Medina, Aus and Khazraj, made their living by farming. Before the arrival of the Prophet, they had been locked up in a war against each other which had lasted for more than five generations. They had fought their last battle only four years earlier, i.e., in A.D. 618, and it had left them utterly exhausted and prostrate.

There were a few Christians also living in Medina. They did not cotton to the Prophet of Islam because he repudiated the doctrine of Trinity, and preached the Unity of the Creator.

A fourth group in Medina was to spring up a little later, made up of the "hypocrites" or the "disaffected." During the Prophet's mission in Makkah, there were many Muslims who had to hide their true faith for fear of persecution. In Medina, the situation was reversed. These people (the hypocrites) were nominal Muslims; they outwardly professed Islam but they were not sincere. They were a potential source of subversion, sabotage and insurrection.

The Charter or Constitution of Medina

The citizens of Yathrib acknowledged Muhammad as their sovereign, and he gave them a "Citizen's Charter" which is believed to have been the first written document in Islam (other than Qur'an). The original charter as preserved by Ibn Ishaq, contains forty-seven (47) clauses. Following are the more important ones out of them:

* All disputes between any two parties in Yathrib would be referred to Muhammad for his decision on them.
* Muslims and Jews would enjoy the same rights.
* Each group in Yathrib would follow its own faith, and no one group would meddle in the affairs of any other groups.
* In the event of an external attack upon Yathrib, both groups, i.e., the Muslims and the Jews, would defend the city.
* Both groups would refrain from shedding blood in the city.
* Muslims would not go to war against other Muslims for the sake of non-Muslims.

R. V. C. Bodley

Mohammed drew up a charter with the Jews whereby, among other things, it was established that Jews and Moslems were to aid each other in all matters concerning the city. They were to be allies against all common enemies, and this without any mutual obligations toward Islam or Judaism. The main clause of this charter ran as follows: The Jews who attach themselves to our commonwealth shall have an equal right with our own people to our assistance and good offices. The Jews of the various branches domiciled in Yathrib shall form with the Moslems one composite nation. They shall practice their religion as freely as the Moslems. The clients and allies of the Jews shall enjoy the same security and freedom. (The Messenger, the Life of Mohammed, New York, 1946)

Muhajireen and Ansar

Muhammad changed the names of the two Muslim groups now living in Medina. He called the refugees from Makkah "Muhajireen" (Emigrants); and he called the citizens of Yathrib who had welcomed them, "Ansar" (Supporters). The two groups were known by these names ever after.

Economic Conditions in Medina

The wealth of Medina was almost entirely concentrated in the hands of the Jews. The Arabs (now the Ansar) lived in poverty and perennial want. One reason why they were chronically poor, was the high rates of interest they had to pay to the Jews on their loans.

D. S. Margoliouth

Though we hear the names of one or two wealthy Yathribites, the bulk of them appear to have been poor. In Yathrib in the Prophet's time, there was only one wedding garment; ornaments had to be borrowed from the Jews. This poverty was probably aggravated by the Jewish money-lending. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

But if the Ansar were poor, the Muhajireen were even poorer. In fleeing from Makkah, they had abandoned everything they had possessed, and when they came to Yathrib seeking sanctuary, they were penniless. In a short time, their situation became desperate. They had to do something to make a living. But since they knew nothing about agriculture, the best they could do was to work as unskilled laborers in the fields and gardens of the Jews and the Ansar.

D. S. Margoliouth

It had originally been arranged that the Refugees should assist the Helpers (Ansar) in their field-work; but knowing nothing of palmiculture, they could only perform the most menial services; thus some literally hewed wood and drew water; some were employed in watering palms, carrying skins on their backs; and Ali, at least on one occasion, earned sixteen dates by filling buckets with water, and emptying them over mould for brick-making at the rate of a date a bucket; which hardly earned a meal he shared with the Prophet. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

To integrate the Muhajireen into the economic life of Medina, was an extremely complex problem, and it taxed all the ingenuity of the Apostle. He did not want any member of the Muslim society, much less all the Muhajireen, to be a burden to anyone else, and did all that he could to curtail their dependence upon the Ansar.

The Brotherhood of the Muhajireen and the Ansar

One of the gambits in the efforts of the Apostle to rehabilitate the homeless Muhajireen in Medina, and to integrate them into the economic and social life of the city, was to make them "brothers" of the Ansar. A few months after his arrival in Medina, he told the Muhajireen and the Ansar that they had to live as "brothers" of each other, and paired them off as follows:

Muhajir Brother of Ansari
Ammar ibn Yasir " Hudhayfa al-Yamani
Abu Bakr Siddique " Kharja bin Zayd
Umar bin al-Khattab " Utban bin Malik
Uthman bin Affan " Aus bin Thabit
Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari " Al-Mundhir b. Amr
Mas'ab ibn Umayr " Abu Ayyub
Abu Obaidah Aamer al-Jarrah " Saad ibn Maadh
Zubayr ibn al-Awwam " Salama bin Waqsh
Abdur Rahman bin Auf " Saad ibn Rabi
Talha bin Obaidullah " Ka'ab ibn Malik
Ali ibn Abi Talib alone was left without a "brother." He was wondering why when the Apostle of God held him by his arms and said to him: "You are my brother in this world and in the next."

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

The Apostle himself took Ali by hand and said: "This is my brother." So God's Apostle, the Lord of the sent ones, and leader of the God-fearing, Apostle of the Lord of the worlds, the peerless and unequaled, and Ali ibn Abi Talib became brothers. (The Life of the Messenger of God)

Edward Gibbon

After a perilous and rapid journey along the sea-coast, Mohammed halted at Koba, two miles from the city, and made his public entry into Medina sixteen days after his flight from Mecca. His bravest disciples assembled round his person; and the equal, though various merits of the Moslems were distinguished by the names of Mohajireen and Ansar, the fugitives of Mecca, and the auxiliaries of Medina. To eradicate the seeds

of jealousy, Mohammed judiciously coupled his principal followers with the rights and obligations of brethren; when Ali found himself without a peer, the Prophet tenderly declared that he would be the companion and brother of the noble youth. (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

The first idea to occur to him (Muhammad) was that of reorganizing Muslim ranks so as to consolidate their unity and to wipe out every possibility of a resurgence of division and hostility. In the realization of this objective, he asked the Muslims to fraternize with one another for the sake of God and to bind themselves in pairs. He explained how he and Ali ibn Abi Talib were brothers… (The Life of Muhammad, 1935)

Muhammad, may God bless him and his Ahlul-Bait, had made the Muhajireen and the Ansar "brothers" of each other. But Ali, like himself, was a Muhajir (Emigrant), and yet he (Muhammad) chose him (Ali) to be his brother. In doing so, he was accenting the extraordinary position and special status of Ali in Islam. Ali, though still young, already outranked everyone else in service to Islam and devotion to duty toward God, and His Messenger. He won this high position by dint of his ability and character.

This was not, however, the first time that the Apostle of God had declared Ali to be his brother. Earlier, while still in Makkah, he had made his leading companions the "brothers" of each other. The pairs of "brothers" in Makkah were made up by Abu Bakr and Umar; Uthman bin Affan and Abdur Rahman bin Auf; Talha and Zubayr; Hamza and Zayd bin Haritha; and Mohammed Mustafa ibn Abdullah and Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Imam Nooruddin Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Shafei'i has quoted the Messenger of God in his book, Seeret Halabia (vol. II, p. 120) as saying: "Ali is my brother in this world as well as in the world Hereafter."

An Assessment of the Roles of the Muhajireen and the Ansar

The Muhajireen had lost all their material possessions in Makkah, and all of them entered Yathrib (Medina) empty-handed. They consisted of two distinct groups. One group was made up of those men who were merchants and traders by profession, and they were very rich. When

they went to Medina, they entered business, were successful at it, and they became rich again.

The other group comprised the "ascetics" of Islam. They were poor in Makkah, and when they migrated to Medina, they still chose to be poor. They spurned worldly riches, and they never held economic power in their hands at any time. Representatives of this group were men like Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari; Ammar ibn Yasir and Miqdad ibn al-Aswad. God paid them His tributes in His Book as follows:

(some part is due) to the indigent Muhajirs, those who were expelled from their homes and their property , while seeking grace from Allah and (His) good pleasure, and aiding Allah and His Apostle: such are indeed the sincere ones. (Chapter 59; verse 8)

The Ansar treated the Muhajireen from Makkah better than the real brothers of the latter would have done. They lodged them in their own homes, gave them household effects; made them partners in farming, or gave them half of their land. Those Ansars who were in business, made the Muhajirs their partners in business. History cannot produce a parallel to the generosity of the Ansars. They were "hosts" not only to the homeless and destitute Muhajireen but also to Islam itself. Islam, uprooted in Makkah, struck new roots in Medina, burgeoned and soon became viable.

The Ansar were indispensable for the physical survival of Islam. Where would Islam be and where would the Muhajireen be if the Ansar had not given them sanctuary? When hostilities with the idolaters began, it were the Ansar, and not the Muhajireen, who bore the brunt of fighting. Without the massive and monolithic support that they gave to the Prophet, the battles of Islam could not have been fought, much less victory won. They were also the recipients of Heaven's compliments and recognition, as we read in the following verse of Al-Qur’an al-Majid:

But those who, before them, had homes (in Medina) and had adopted the faith, – show their affection to such as came to them for refuge, and entertain no desire, in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their (own lot). And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls, – they are the ones that achieve prosperity. (Chapter 59; verse 9)

The Muhajireen, at the beginning, had no way of repaying the Ansar for their generosity and kindness. But did they ever acknowledge their gratitude? It appears that with the exception of two Muhajirs, no one else ever did. The two exceptions were Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of God, and Ali, his vicegerent. They acknowledged their debt of gratitude to the Ansar both by word and by deed, and they never missed an opportunity of doing so. After all, both Muhammad and Ali, as the only guardians of the ethos of Islam, were aware that it (Islam) had found a haven in Medina with the Ansar. The latter, therefore, held a very special place in their hearts.

The rest of the Muhajireen, i.e., the rich ones among them, did not share the solicitude of Muhammad and Ali for the Ansar. When power came into their hands, they pushed the Ansar into the background, and relegated them to play only minor roles. In the beginning, they merely ignored the Ansar. But being ignored was not so bad compared to what was to befall them in later times.

(Between the period covered by the Sira and the editing of the book itself loom two tragedies of Kerbela, when Husayn and his followers were slain in 61 A.H., and the sack of Medina in A.H. 63, when some ten thousand of the Ansar including no less than eighty of the Prophet's companions were put to death). – Quoted in the Introduction to the biography of the Prophet by Ibn Ishaq).

The Muhajireen foisted the crypt-pagans of Makkah – the Umayyads - upon them. The Umayyads were the arch-enemies of the Ansar. If the generosity of the Ansar to the Muhajireen has no parallel in history, the ingratitude of the latter toward their benefactors also has no parallel. When the Muhajireen came to Medina, the Ansar were its masters. It was only through the courtesy of the Ansar that the Muhajireen could enter and live in Medina. But as soon as Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, and the friend and patron of the Ansar, died, they ceased to be masters in their own home. His death was the signal for the abrupt reversal in their fortunes.

Chapter 20

The Battles of Islam

Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, had to fight a series of battles in the defense of Islam from his new home in Medina. Those battles in which he led the army of Islam in person, are called "Ghazwa" and those expeditions which he sent out from Medina under the command of any one of his companions, are called "Sariyya".

Roughly speaking, the Prophet launched 80 campaigns during the ten years from his migration in A.D. 622 to his death in A.D. 632. Some of these campaigns were nothing more than reconnaissance missions. The numbers involved in them were minuscule, and all they did was to watch the movements of some clan or tribe. Some were missionary expeditions. Many others were minor skirmishes. Still others were of interest only because of some particular incident attaching to them. I shall give a cursory account of the minor campaigns, and will then put the focus on the major battles of Islam.

Long before Islam, the Greeks and the Romans had learned that a battle could change the destinies of nations. Among the campaigns of the Prophet, there are five battles about which it can be said that they changed the destinies of nations. They are the battles of Badr, Uhud, Khandaq, Khyber and Hunayn.

These battles were inevitable. The Quraysh of Makkah believed that if all Arabs accepted Islam, it would mean to them (the Quraysh) the loss of all the pilgrim revenues, and the loss of their privileges which they enjoyed as the guardians of the idols. A triumph of Islam was correctly foreseen by them as a death blow to privilege. It was this fear, the fear of the loss of economic and political power and prestige that precipitated war between them and the Muslims.

Since the emigration of the Muslims from Makkah, a de facto state of war had existed between them and the Quraysh. In the early days in Medina, the Muslims did not dare to remove their armor at any time. Pickets were posted around the city every night to warn the citizens if the enemy made a sudden raid. The Apostle could not sleep at nights being fearful of an attack at any time. It was in these circumstances that he had to take some defensive measures for the security of Medina. As head of the nascent state, its security was his first responsibility.

In the interests of security, the Muslims had to keep an eye on the movements of the enemy, his friends and his allies.

The Prophet sent out the first expedition in the ninth month of the first year of Hijra, under the command of his uncle, Hamza ibn Abdul Muttalib. Thirty Muhajirs took part in it. Their aim was to intercept a caravan of Quraysh. But a tribe, friendly to both sides, interposed between them. There was no fighting, and the expedition returned to Medina.

In the following month, the Prophet sent sixty Muhajirs under the command of his cousin, Obaida ibn al-Harith, to Rabigh, near the Red Sea. They encountered a caravan of the Quraysh. Both sides shot a few arrows at each other but there were no casualties. Two Makkan traders deserted their caravan, came over to the Muslim side, accepted Islam, and accompanied the expedition when it returned to Medina.

Obaida ibn al-Harith is said to have shot an arrow at the enemy. It was the first arrow shot for Islam.

Sir William Muir

Obaida is distinguished in tradition as he who upon this occasion, "shot the first arrow for Islam." (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

There were no more campaigns in the remainder of the first year of Hijra.

Chapter 21

The Second Year of the Hijra

The first expedition that Muhammad Mustafa led in person, was the Ghazwa (campaign) of Waddan. He appointed Saad ibn Ubadah as governor of Medina, and took a group of his followers to Waddan, a village between Medina and Makkah. A caravan of the Quraysh was reported to have halted there. But the caravan had left Waddan before the arrival of the Muslims. They, therefore, rested for a few days and then returned to Medina.

In the seventh month (Rajab) of the second year of Hijra, i.e., fifteen months after the migration from Makkah, the Apostle sent seven men under the command of his cousin, Abdullah ibn Jahash, to Nakhla, an oasis in the south, where they had to watch the movements of a certain caravan of the Quraysh.

In Nakhla, Abdullah found a small caravan of the Quraysh which was returning to Makkah. The caravaneers were Amr bin al-Hadhrami, Uthman bin Abdullah bin al-Mughira, and his brother, Naufal, and Hakam bin Kaisan. Abdullah attacked them and seized their goods. Amr bin al-Hadhrami was killed; Uthman and Hakam were captured; and Naufal succeeded in escaping.

This expedition is considered important because it was the first time when there was a clash between the Muslims and the pagans. It was also the first time when there was bloodshed between them, and the Muslims captured booty from them.

Abdullah ibn Jahash and his party returned to Medina with their prisoners and the spoils of war. Of the two prisoners, Hakam bin Kaisan

accepted Islam and stayed in Medina. Uthman bin Abdullah was ransomed by his folks, and he went to Makkah.

Change of Qibla – February 11, A.D. 624

During the first sixteen months after the Hijra (Migration), the Qibla of the Muslims for prayers was Jerusalem (they faced Jerusalem when saying their prayers). Then the Apostle of God received Wahi (Revelation) commanding him to change the orientation point from Jerusalem in the north to Makkah in the south.

Dr. Montgomery Watt and John Christopher have given their"reasons" for the change in the direction of Qibla. They say that in the beginning, the Prophet had hoped that facing Jerusalem when praying, would cause the hearts of the Jews of Yathrib to incline toward him, and they would acknowledge him as a Messenger of God. But he noticed, they further say, that though he faced Jerusalem, when praying, the Jews remained skeptical of his truthfulness and sincerity. Then they add that after 16 months, the Prophet gave up the hope of converting the Jews to Islam.

According to Dr. Montgomery Watt and John Christopher and some other orientalists, once the Prophet lost hope of winning the Jews to Islam, he lost interest in them, and he decided to focus attention on the Arabs. The change of Qibla, they assert, was a gesture to please the Arabs.

We do not know if the Jews were displeased or if the Arabs were pleased with the change of Qibla. We, in fact, do not even know which Arabs, according to Dr. Watt, the Prophet was trying to please – the Arabs of Medina or the Arabs of Makkah!

The Arabs of Medina had accepted Islam and they obeyed the Prophet. For them the important thing was to obey him since he was the Interpreter of God's message to mankind. They faced Makkah when praying and didn't ask any questions why Qibla was changed.

The Arabs of Makkah were still idolaters. They also heard the news of the change of Qibla from Jerusalem to Makkah. But there is no evidence that any of them, pleased and flattered by this change, came to Medina and volunteered to become Muslims. They remained what they were whether the Qibla was Jerusalem or Makkah.

The Muslim explanation is simple and logical; God commanded His slave, Muhammad, to change the Qibla, and he obeyed. The command to change the Qibla was given in verse 44 of the second chapter of Al-Qur’an al-Majid.

In Sha'aban (8th month) of the second year of Hijra, fasting during the month of Ramadan (9th month) was made mandatory for the Muslims. They, therefore, fasted during the following month. At the end of the month of fasting, they were required to pay Zakat-al-Fitr, a special poor-tax.

In the same year, another tax, Zakat-ul-Mal, was imposed upon the Muslims. This tax is assessed at the rate of 2.5 per cent of a Muslim's wealth. In the times of the Prophet, this tax was paid into the Bayt-ul-Mal or public treasury, and was spent on the welfare of the poor and the sick members of the community. But if there is no Bayt-ul-Mal, the Muslims must pay it to the deserving poor, the widows, the orphans and those members of the community who have no means of supporting themselves.

Chapter 22

The Battle of Badr

THE WAR OF NERVES BETWEEN THE QURAYSH AND THE MUSLIMS could escalate into open hostilities at any time. Abu Jahl was one of the "hawks" in Makkah who carried on a non-stop private war against Muhammad Mustafa and his followers. His jingoism kept Makkah in a state of constant agitation.

V. C. Bodley

Abu Jahl's monomania about Mohammed had remained at boiling point. He kept raiding parties continually on the move, attacking any isolated parties of Moslems which could be ambushed. He made forays into the suburbs of Medina and damaged crops and gardens. He let Mohammed see that his feelings had not changed, that his intentions were still murderous. (The Messenger, the Life of Mohammed, New York, 1946)

In early March 624, reports were received in Medina that a caravan of Quraysh was returning to Makkah from Syria. The caravan was carrying not only merchandise but also weapons. It was estimated that the caravan had made a profit of 50,000 dinars (pieces of gold). The weapons and the newly-acquired wealth were to be used, according to the same reports, to equip an army to fight against the Muslims. The caravan was led by Abu Sufyan, the chief of the clan of Banu Umayya.

Muhammad Mustafa decided to intercept the Makkan caravan. He appointed Abu Lababa as governor of Medina, and left the city with a force of 313 men. Of these 80 were Muhajirs, and 233 were the Ansars. Their destination was Badr, a village in the south-west of Medina where they expected to make contact with the Makkan caravan.

The Muslims did not know it then that they would never see the caravan of the Quraysh, and that they would, instead, be engaged in an encounter, on the battlefield, with the army of the Quraysh.

In the meantime, the Makkan spies also informed Abu Sufyan that a body of Muslims had left Medina, and was rapidly moving toward his caravan. As soon as he heard this, he abandoned thecustomary caravan route, led the caravan westward to the Red Sea coast, and then turned south toward Makkah via an off-beat track. He also sent a messenger to Makkah asking for aid. In Makkah, Abu Jahl was already busy whipping up public fury against the Muslims, following the incident at Nakhla. He eagerly responded to Abu Sufyan's appeal, and led out of Makkah a force of 1000 warriors including a cavalry of 100, against the Muslims. A train of 700 camels carried materials for war and other supplies. The infantry was wearing chain-mail and armor.

Muhammad Mustafa did not know that an army had left Makkah and was marching toward Medina to protect the caravan of the Quraysh, and to challenge the Muslims. When the Prophet arrived in the environs of Badr, he sent Ali ibn Abi Talib to reconnoiter the surrounding country. At the wells of Badr, Ali surprised some water-carriers. In reply to his questions, they told him that they were carrying water for an army which came from Makkah, and which was encamped on the other side of the nearby hills.

Ali brought the water-carriers before the Prophet of Islam. From them he learned that the caravan of the Quraysh had already escaped, and that the Muslims, at that very moment, were confronted by the army of Makkah.

Sir William Muir

On reaching the neighborhood of Badr, Mohammed sent forward Ali, with a few others, to reconnoiter the rising ground above the springs. There they surprised three water-carriers of the enemy, as they were about to fill their sheepskins. One escaped to the Coreish; the other two were captured and taken to the Moslem army. From them Mohammed discovered the proximity of his enemy. There were 950 men; more than threefold the number of the Moslem army. They were mounted on 700

camels and 100 horses, the horsemen all clad in mail. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

This most vital intelligence was received through Ali ibn Abi Talib. His action, on the one hand, alerted the Muslims; and on the other, robbed the enemy of the advantage of surprise. The Muslims were ready to meet him.

Nevertheless, the presence of an active, aggressive and menacing enemy, instead of a rich caravan, within close proximity, had changed the entire situation for the Muslims, and they had to make a fresh assessment of the perils and possibilities of a confrontation with him. They were poorly equipped, and had only two horses and 70 camels with them. Some of them had swords but no shields and others had shields but no swords. The Prophet who was aware of these apparent handicaps, called a council of war, and put the matter before his companions for consideration and decision.

The first man who rose to speak on this critical occasion, was Miqdad. He voiced the feelings and thoughts of the Muhajireen when he said: "O Messenger of God, do what God has commanded you to do. We are with you, now and at all times; and we shall not tell you what the Israelites told Moses: 'You and your Lord should go and fight against the enemy; as for us, we shall stay here, and sit here.' No, we shall not imitate the Israelites. We shall follow you and obey your orders."

Muhammad gave his blessings to Miqdad. But Miqdad was a Muhajir, and Muhammad was anxious to know what the Ansar would do. He had assumed that the Ansar would fight in the defense of Medina itself but might not like to fight outside their city. Sensing his anxiety, Saad ibn Muadh, one of the leaders of the Ansar, rose and said: "We have borne witness that you are the Messenger of God. We have given you our pledge to obey you. Wherever you go, we shall go with you. If there is a showdown with the polytheists, we shall be steadfast in our support to you. In war and in peace, we shall be consistently faithful to you."

This unequivocal declaration of support by the leader of the Ansar, pleased the Apostle, and he invoked the blessings of God upon them all. He knew that neither the battle of Badr nor any other battle could be fought without the support of the Ansar. The Ansar were, in fact,

indispensable for success in the struggle between Islam and paganism, as noted before.

Materially and numerically, the Muslims were at a disadvantage but these disadvantages were offset by their morale. They had faith in the inspired leadership of Muhammad. And they were united. Their unity and singleness of purpose were going to be a source of immense strength to them in the forthcoming contest with the Makkan army.

With the support of the Ansar assured, Muhammad Mustafa took the decision to accept the challenge of the Quraysh. He and the rank-and-file of the army of Medina appear to have been fully aware that the outcome of the contest with the foe on the following day, would be overwhelming in its effects.

Sir William Muir

Mohammed was fully alive to the critical situation. The fate of Islam hung upon the issue of the approaching battle. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

The Prophet ordered the Muslims to pitch their tents on the ground where they had halted. But a young man of the Ansar pointed out the advantages of choosing another campsite where the ground was higher and firmer, and he also suggested that the Muslims take possession of all the wells of Badr. His suggestions were forthwith accepted.

S. Margoliouth

Hubab son of al-Mundhir, the Prophet's junior by twenty years, having ascertained that they were engaged in ordinary warfare, and possessing a special knowledge of the wells in the neighborhood, advised the Prophet to get in front of all except one, round which they should make a reservoir, so as to have a constant supply of water for the troops; the possession of this valuable element would then save the day. The Prophet welcomed the suggestion and placed his force under Hubab's guidance. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

Events soon proved that Hubab's suggestion was an excellent one, and its acceptance by the Prophet gave the Muslims a great tactical advantage over the enemy.

The battle of Badr was fought in the second year of Hijra, on the 17th of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar (March 15, 624). The Makkan army moved out of its camp early in the morning to meet the Muslims. The two armies ranged themselves in battle formation. The Prophet took a bow in his hand and walked between the lines dressing the rows of the Muslims. His last act before the battle began, was to pray to God to grant victory to His humble slaves.

The battle began in the traditional Arab manner of warfarein which a champion of one side rode or stepped out of his line, and challenged the heroes of the enemy to meet him in single combat. This gave him an opportunity to win personal glory by showing his own bravery, his strength and his skills at horsemanship. The two armies often served as a kind of chorus for combats between a few boastful heroes. After these initial duels, it was customary for the two armies to attack each other, and to engage in hand-to-hand fighting.

From the Makkan side, three warriors, Utbah the son of Rabia; Shaiba, his brother; and Walid, his son; came out into the open space between the two armies, and challenged the Muslims. Their challenge was taken up by Hamza, an uncle of Muhammad and Ali; Obaida ibn al-Harith, a cousin of Muhammad and Ali; and Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Walid bin Utbah was one of the fiercest warriors of Makkah. Ali found himself facing him. They were the youngest pair, and they were the first to engage in fighting. The other two pairs paused, to watch the young warriors in action. The two young men exchanged a few blows, and then Ali struck the blow which killed Walid.

As soon as Walid was killed, the other warriors also charged at each other. Hamza killed Utbah. But Obaida was mortally wounded by Shaiba. When Ali saw Obaida collapsing, he attacked Shaiba, and killed him too. With their opponents dead, and no one in the field, Ali and Hamza carried Obaida back into the Muslim lines where he succumbed to his wounds. He was the first Muslim to be killed in the battle-field.

Sir William Muir

The two brothers, Shaiba and Otba, and Walid, the son of Otba, advanced into the space between the armies, and defied three champions

from the army of Mohammed to meet them singly. Mohammed turning to his kinsmen, said: "Ye, sons of Hashim! Arise and fight, according to your right." Then Hamza, Obeida, and Ali, the uncle and cousins of the Prophet, went forth. Hamza wore an ostrich feather in his breast, and a white plume distinguished the helmet of Ali. Then Otba called on his son, Walid, "Arise and fight." So Walid stepped forth and Ali came out against him. They were the youngest of the six. The combat was short; Walid fell mortally wounded by the sword of Ali.

(The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

Sir John Glubb

Three Meccan chiefs, Otba, Shaiba and Waleed, the son of Otba, advanced in front of the line of Quraish and defied three Muslims to meet them in single combat. Mohammed turning to the Emigrants called out: "O Beni Hashim, stand up and fight." Three men in chain-mail stepped from the Muslim ranks. They were Hamza, the Prophet's uncle; Ali ibn Abi Talib, his cousin, and the first male convert; and Ubaida ibn Harith.

The youngest pair engaged first, Ali stepping forward to meet Waleed. After a few moments of fencing, Waleed fell by the sword of his Muslim opponent. Then Hamza engaged Otba and cut him down. Ubaida ibn Harith, the third Muslim champion, received a fatal wound from Shaiba. Ali and Hamza hastily dispatched Shaiba, carrying Ubaida to die in the Muslim lines. (The Great Arab Conquests, 1963)

Badr was the first encounter, on the battle-field, between Islam and Heathenism. It was opened on the side of Islam, by Ali ibn Abi Talib, the young lion, and his victory was the signal of the triumph of Islam. All other battles of Islam followed the same pattern; Ali was the victor in every one of them

Quraysh had sent three champions against the Muslims, and all three had been slain. Abu Jahl, therefore, was not very eager to take further chances with Ali and Hamza, and he ordered his troops to advance. The Makkans charged the Muslims but could not break their formations. They charged again and again but the Muslim line held firm under the command of Ali and Hamza.

The Makkans were regrouping for a new attack when the Prophet signaled the Muslims to advance. Ali and Hamza led the counter-charge, and both of them carried slaughter and dismay into the thickest of the enemy ranks. Many of the Makkan leaders and officers were killed, among them Abu Jahl himself. After his death, the idolaters were unable to regroup, and they began to retreat. The Muslims pressed their advantage, and the Makkan retreat soon became a rout.

Islam had won its first and the most important victory!

S. Margoliouth

It certainly appears that the winning of this most important fight was in the main due to the prowess of Ali and Hamza. The Prophet is said to have bestowed especial praise on the valor of Simak s/o Kharashah;Sahl s/o Hunaif; al-Harith s/o al-Simmah; and Kais s/o al-Rabi; all of them Medinese. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

Tor Andre

By noon the battle was over. The Quraysh fled. Forty-nine of the enemy had fallen and Ali had killed twenty-two, either alone or with the help of others. An equal number was captured. The believers had lost fourteen men on the field of battle. (Mohammed, the Man and his Faith, 1960)

As noted above, Badr is the most important battle in the entire history of Islam, and one of the most important in world history. Victory guaranteed the existence of Islam, and the physical survival of the Muslim community of Medina which heretofore had appeared, at best, to be precarious.

A. Nicholson

But the importance of Mohammed's success (in the battle of Badr) cannot be measured by the material damage which he inflicted (upon the pagans of Mecca). Considering the momentous issues involved, we must allow that Badr, like Marathon, is one of the greatest and most memorable battles in all history. (A Literary History of the Arabs, 1969)

Ali ibn Abi Talib and the Battle of Badr

The architect of the Victory of Islam at Badr, without any doubt, was Ali ibn Abi Talib. M. Shibli, the Indian historian who wrote the most authoritative biographies in Urdu of Umar bin al-Khattab and of the Prophet of Islam, says in his Life of the Apostle, that the hero of the battle of Badr is Ali ibn Abi Talib.

F. E. Peters

Badr was a Muslim triumph, as total as it was unexpected; the Muslims lost 14 men and the Quraysh from 50 to 70, including their leader, Abu Jahl. It was an immense psychological victory and there was plentiful booty for the economically distressed Emigrants. This was no mere raid, however. It pitted Muslim against non-Muslim in Holy War, and fathers against sons in civil strife. The Quraysh casualties were extraordinarily high, and since most of them had occurred among the chiefs, the leadership at Mecca was permanently crippled. (Allah's Commonwealth, 1973)

The leadership of the polytheists of Makkah was indeed permanently crippled at Badr. The hero responsible for this was Ali. He alone killed 22 Makkans, twelve of them being the leading members of the clan of Banu Umayya. The rest of the army of Islam killed another 27 pagans.

Among the spoils of the battle of Badr was a sword which was to become the most famous sword in the whole history of Islam. Its name was Dhul-Fiqar.

Washington Irving

Among the spoils of the battle of Badr was a famous sword of admirable temper called Dhul-Fiqar, or the Piercer. Mohammed ever afterwards bore it when in battle, and his son-in-law, Ali, inherited it at his death. (The Life of Mohammed)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the translator and commentator of Qur’an, says that the battle of Badr is called the Furqaan in Muslim theology, because it was the first trial of strength by battle, in Islam, between the powers of good and evil. Furqaan means criterion between right and wrong;

decision between the forces of Faith and Unbelief. The battle of Badr is called by this name.

The Prisoners of War

The Muslims captured fifty prisoners of war. They were brought before the Prophet who had to decide what to do with them. He consulted his companions in the matter. Umar advised him to kill them all, but Abu Bakr advised him to set them free for ransom. The Prophet accepted Abu Bakr's advice.

Since there was no house of detention in Medina, the Prophet distributed the prisoners among the Muslim families. These families treated their prisoners as if they were their guests. Some of them fed their own food to their "guests" and themselves went hungry. They actually embarrassed their prisoners by their solicitude for their welfare. The rich prisoners were released for a ransom. Those prisoners who could not pay a ransom but could read and write, were asked to teach these arts to the Muslim children, and when they did, they were also released. Those prisoners who were destitute, were released without any ransom.

Results of the Battle of Badr

Victory at Badr invested Islam with immense prestige. The threat to the security of Medina was averted, and Muhammad Mustafa could now lay the foundations of the first and the last Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

S. Margoliouth

No event in the history of Islam was of more importance than this battle (Badr); Koran rightly calls it the Day of Deliverance, the day before which the Moslems were weak, after which they were strong. Wealth, fame, honor, power, all of them were secured or at any rate brought within reach by the Day of Deliverance. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

One lamentable outcome of the battle of Badr, however, was that Islam's victory kindled new and fiercer fires of hatred and hostility in the breasts of the Banu Umayya against Muhammad Mustafa and Ali ibn

Abi Talib. Their hatred and jealousy of Banu Hashim had spanned many generations. But after the battle of Badr, their hostility was focused on Ali and on the children of Muhammad Mustafa.

If to the Muslims, Ali was the symbol of the triumph of Islam, to the Banu Umayya, he was the symbol of the destruction of their polytheism and their privileges. Therefore, they, their generations to come, and their friends and their supporters, never forgave Ali for the role he played before, during and after the battle of Badr. Their hatred is understandable. It was Ali, and Ali alone who had struck, not only at Badr, but in every encounter, at the massive, coordinated and concentrated power of heathendom, and had destroyed it.

Chapter 23

The Marriage of Fatima Zahra and Ali ibn Abi Talib

God gave victory to Islam in the battle of Badr in the year 2 of Hijri. Two months after the battle, Fatima Zahra, the daughter of Muhammad Mustafa, and Ali, the son of Abu Talib were married.

Fatima Zahra was only five years old when her mother – Khadija, may God bless her – died, and thenceforth, her father, Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of God, took charge of the duties of a mother also for her. The death of her mother had created a void in her life but her father filled it with his love and tenderness.

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, gave the utmost attention to the education and upbringing of his daughter. If he was the ideal for all men, his daughter had to be the ideal for all women, and she was. He made her the ideal of womanhood in Islam. She was the personification of devotion and obedience to the Creator, and she was the embodiment of all heavenly purity and saintliness. In character and personality, she bore a most striking resemblance to her father. Fatima, the daughter, was the image of Muhammad, the father.

By dint of obedience and service to God, Fatima Zahra rose to the highest rank in His sight, as attested by Al-Qur'an al-Majid. God bestowed the greatest honors upon her, and the Prophet of Islam, on his part, showed her the mark of greatest respect, one which he did not show to any other man or woman at any time in his life.

When Fatima grew up, two old companions – first one and then the other – asked her father for her hand in marriage. But he turned away from them in disgust, and said:

"This matter of the marriage of Fatima, my daughter, is in the hands of Allah Himself, and He alone will select a spouse for her".

Allah duly made His selection. He selected His slave, Ali ibn Abi Talib, to be the spouse of the daughter of His most favorite slave, Muhammad Mustafa. He wished to see Fatima bint Muhammad and Ali ibn Abi Talib married.

Two months after the battle of Badr, i.e., in the month of Zilqa'ad (the 11th month) of 2 A.H., Ali called on Muhammad Mustafa, and said: "O Messenger of God, you have brought me up as your own child. You have overwhelmed me with your gifts, your generosity and your kindness. I owe you everything in my life. Now I seek one more kindness from you."

The Apostle understood what Ali was trying to say. His face lighted up in a broad smile, and he bade Ali to wait for a few moments until he obtained his daughter's answer. He entered the house, told Fatima that Ali was asking for her hand in marriage, and asked her what was her response. She kept quiet. He interpreted her silence as her assent, returned to Ali, informed him that his proposal was accepted, and told him to make preparations for the wedding.

On the last day of Zilqa'ad (the 11th month), Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of God, invited the Muhajireen and the Ansar, to attend a banquet, on the occasion of the marriage of his daughter. He was going to be their host. When all the guests arrived, and were seated, he obtained, once again, the formal consent of his daughter for her marriage with Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Muhammad Mustafa praised Allah, and thanked Him for all His mercies. He then read the sermon of marriage; declared Ali and Fatima husband and wife, and invoked the blessings of Allah upon both of them. All the guests congratulated the Apostle on this most auspicious occasion. After this ceremony, the guests feasted upon lamb meat, bread, date fruit and milk.

A few days later, i.e., in Zilhajj (the 12th month), Fatima Zahra had to bid farewell to her parental home so she could go to the house of her husband. Her father assisted her in riding his she-camel. Medina rang

with the shouts of Allah-o-Akbar. Salman the Persian held the reins of the she-camel, and walked in front of it, as he recited Qur'an. The Apostle of God walked on one side of the she-camel, and Hamza, the Lion of God, on the other. All the young cavaliers of Banu Hashim rode as escorts of the bride, with gleaming swords held high. Behind them were the Muhajir and Ansar women, and behind them came the Muhajireen and the Ansar themselves. They were reciting hymns from Al-Qur'an al-Majid to the glory of God. The recitation of hymns was punctuated from time to time by thunderous shouts of Allah-o-Akbar.

This heavenly cavalcade made a circuit of the Great Mosque of Medina, and then halted at its destination – the house of the bridegroom – Ali ibn Abi Talib. Muhammad Mustafa aided his daughter in alighting from the she-camel. He held her hand, and symbolically placed it in the hand of her husband, and then, standing at the threshold of the house, said the following prayer:

"O Allah! I commend Fatima and Ali, Thy humble slaves, to Thy protection. Be Thou their Protector. Bless them. Be pleased with them, and bestow Thy boundless grace, mercy, and Thy best rewards upon them. Make their marriage fruitful, and make both of them steadfast in Thy love, and Thy service."

It was a truly happy day in the life of Muhammad Mustafa. But how he must have wished that his beloved wife and friend, Khadija, were with him so both of them together could witness the wedding of their daughter.

A few days later, the Apostle of God called on his daughter, and asked her how she had found her husband. She said that she found him the best companion in giving devotion and obedience to God. Later, he asked Ali how he had found his wife, and he said that he found her the best companion in giving service to the Creator. The greatest moments of life for both husband and wife were those when they went into the Presence of their Lord, and were absorbed in praying to Him.

Between Ali and Fatima Zahra, there was total identity of interests. Both were brought up and educated by Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, and Khadija-tul-Kubra. Both, therefore, shared the ideals of their parents. Both put service to God ahead of everything else. There

was absolutely no room for any disagreement between them. Their thoughts, words and deeds, all were "conditioned" by Al-Qur’an al-Majid. Their marriage therefore, was just as perfect and just as happy as the marriage of Muhammad and Khadija had been.

As noted above, Fatima's greatest pleasure was to wait upon Allah. She spent most of her time in prayer. Her second greatest pleasure was to carry out her duties toward her family. God was pleased to bestow upon her four children – first two boys and then two girls. She ground grain in a mill which her father had given her as part of her dowry, and baked bread for them. Grinding grain day after day caused blisters to form on her hands but she never complained to her husband or to her father about them, and did all her housework cheerfully.

The household duties could become quite exacting for Fatima Zahra but she found happiness and strength in the remembrance of God. The Book of God was her constant companion. She forgot the drudgery of work as she read passages from that book. And when she put her children to sleep in the crib, she again read selections from the same book as "lullabies" to them. They grew up hearing Al-Qur’an al-Majid from their infancy. She etched the Word of God upon their young hearts. Through such "osmosis," Qur’an and the children of Fatima Zahra became inseparable for all time.

In the same year, i.e., in 2 A.H., public prayers on the two holidays for the Muslims, viz., Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha, were made a sunnat (meritorious) for them.

Chapter 24

The Battle of Uhud

The battle of Uhud was a reprisal against the Muslims following the battle of Badr. Some of the leading members of Quraysh such as Abu Jahl, Utbah, Shaiba, Walid, Umayya bin Khalaf, and Hanzala bin Abu Sufyan, had been killed in the battle of Badr. After the death of Abu Jahl, leadership of the Makkans had passed on to his compeer, Abu Sufyan, who was the chief of the clan of Banu Umayya. There was profound sorrow in Makkah at the loss of so many chiefs but Abu Sufyan had forbidden the bereaved families to cry and to lament their losses. Tears, he knew, could wash away malevolence from the hearts. But time and tears, he asserted, would not be allowed to heal the wounds received by the Makkan aristocracy at Badr. He himself had taken an oath that he would remain a stranger to every pleasure until he had paid the Muslims back in their own coin. He and the other leaders of the Quraysh spent a whole year of feverish activity in which they equipped and trained a new army.

One year after the battle of Badr, the new army of the idolaters of Makkah was ready to take the field against the Muslims. In March 625 Abu Sufyan left Makkah at the head of three thousand seasoned warriors. Most of them were foot soldiers but they were supported by a strong contingent of cavalry. Also accompanying the army, was a band of warlike women. Their duty was to wage "psychological warfare" against the Muslims by reading poetry and by singing amatory songs to spur the courage and the will-to-fight of the soldiers. They knew that nothing held such terror for the Arabs as the jibes of women for cowardice, and they also knew that nothing was so efficacious to turn them into utterly reckless fighters as the promise of physical love. These amazons included the wives of Abu Sufyan and Amr bin Aas, and the sister of Khalid bin Walid.

D. S. Margoliouth

Abu Sufyan appears to have done his best, and, as a substitute for military music, caused or permitted the army to be followed by a company of ladies, who, by threatening and promising, were to keep the courage of the troops to its proper level; for nothing did the refugee from the battle-field dread more than the reproaches of his women-folk. The Kuraishite ladies did some certainly curious service. The wife of Abu Sufyan made the suggestion that the body of Mohammed's mother should be exhumed and kept as hostage; but the Kuraish rejected this suggestion (of which the practicability was surely doubtful) for fear of reprisals. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, 1931)

As if the heavy overtones of sex introduced by the women of the Quraysh were not enough, Abu Sufyan invested his campaign with "religious sanctity" as well. To leave no doubt in anyone's mind that he was engaged in a holy war against the Muslims, he placed Hubal, the idol that the clan of Banu Umayya worshipped as its supreme deity, on a camel, and carried it with him into the battle. Hubal's duty was to boost the morale of the idolaters by his presence in the battle-field.

Sex and religion were the two new components mobilized by the Quraysh in their war against Mohammed and Islam.

Betty Kelen

In one howdah rode Hubal, on holiday from the Kaaba. Abu Sufyan had well grasped that quite apart from considerations of revenge and caravan routes, he was engaged in a holy war. (Muhammad, the Messenger of God, 1975)

Muhammad Mustafa, the Prophet of Islam, also heard reports of the impending invasion of Medina by the Makkans, and he too ordered his followers to prepare themselves for defense. Seven hundred Muslims were ready to follow him into battle.

The prophet stationed his army with the mountain of Uhud in its rear so that it stood facing Medina. When the Makkan army came up, it took

its position in front of the Muslims so that it was standing between them and Medina which was in its rear.

Sir William Muir

Abu Sufyan, as hereditary leader, brought up the Meccan army; and facing Ohod, marshaled it in front of Mohammed. The banner was borne by Talha son of Abd al Ozza. The right wing was commanded by Khalid; the left by Ikrima son of Abu Jahl. Amr bin Aas was over the Coreishite horse. (The Life of Mohammed, 1877)

Sir John Glubb

The Muslims advanced with 700 men against 3000 warriors from Mecca. Moreover, while the Muslims could muster only one hundred men with coats of chain-mail, and no horses, Quraish and their allies included 700 men in armor and 200 horsemen.

Wishing to cover their rear in view of their small numbers, the Muslims posted themselves at the foot of Mt. Ohad. Their right flank and rear were covered by the mountains, but their left flank lay in open ground and was thus exposed to a charge by the enemy cavalry. To guard against this, Mohammed posted fifty archers on this flank, with orders on no account to leave their post, from which they could protect the Muslim left wing from the Quraish horse.

The Meccans drew up their line facing the Muslims in such a way that the latter, with their backs to Ohad, were facing Medina, while the Quraish line confronted them with Medina in its rear, thereby interposing between the Muslims and the town.

Quraish had brought a number of women with them, riding in camel-litters. These now, as the two lines drew towards one another, proceeded to rouse the enthusiasm of the Meccans, beating upon tambourines, reciting martial poetry and letting down their long hair. (The Great Arab Conquests)

The battle of Uhud began just as the battle of Badr had begun, with a Makkan warrior advancing from his lines and challenging the Muslims to single combat.

Sir William Muir

Flourishing the Coreishite banner, Talha, the standard-bearer of the Meccan army, advanced, and challenged the enemy to single combat. Ali stepped forth, and, rushing on him, with one blow of his sword brought him to the ground. Mohammed, who had intently watched the rapid combat, exclaimed, with a loud voice: Great is the Lord! and the cry, repeated, arose in an overwhelming shout from the whole Muslim army. (Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Talha ibn Abu Talha, carrier of the Meccan flag, sprang forward asking the Muslims to duel with him. Ali ibn Abi Talib advanced forth to fight with him. The encounter was soon over as Ali struck his enemy a single fatal stroke. Exalted, the Prophet and the Muslims yelled, "God is Great." (The Life of Muhammad, 1935, Cairo)

R.V.C. Bodley

The Meccans, generously assisted by the women who had brought their timbrels, flung insults at the Moslems. These were alternated by Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan, who led triumphant choruses as she danced round the idol which perched on the camel.

Talha, the hereditary standard-bearer of the Koreishites, was the first Meccan challenger. As he stepped out of Abu Sufyan's ranks, Ali stepped out of Mohammed's. The two men met in the middle of ‘no man's land.' Without words or preliminary flourishes the duel began. Talha never stood a chance. Ali's scimitar flashed in the morning sun and the head of the standard-bearer leaped from his shoulder and rolled away on the sand.

‘Allah-o-Akbar!' cried Mohammed. ‘Allah-o-Akbar!' ‘Allah-o-Akbar!' echoed from the eagerly watching Moslems. (The Messenger, the Life of Mohammed, New York, 1946)

Sir John Glubb

The two lines drew up opposite one another. Talha ibn Abdul Uzza, of Abdul Dar, burning with resentment at the taunts of Abu Sufyan, and bearing the standard of Quraish, stepped out before the line and challenged any Muslim to single combat. Ali ran forward and slew him with a single slash of his sword, the Quraish standard falling to the ground. From the Muslim line rose a great shout, Allah-o-Akbar, God is Most Great." (The Life and Times of Mohammed)

This is one of the most dramatic scenes in the history of Islam. Muhammad, the Messenger of God, was watching his cousin, Ali, in action, and was thrilled by his swift victory. When the tremendous stroke of Ali's sword killed the pagan general, Muhammad shouted Allah-o-Akbar, and the battle-cry was taken up by the whole army of Islam.

Ali's irresistible stroke had caused the standard of the Makkans, the emblem of idolatry and polytheism, to fall into the dust. He had won the first round for Islam, and had dealt the death blow to the morale of the Quraysh.

When Ali returned to his lines, Talha's brother, Uthman ibn Abu Talha, made an attempt to retrieve the Makkan banner. But Hamza came out of the Muslim line, and killed him.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

When Ali ibn Abu Talib killed the carrier of Makkan flag, Talhah ibn Abu Talha, it was immediately raised again by Uthman ibn Abu Talha. And when Uthman fell at the hands of Hamzah, it was raised again by Abu Sa'd ibn Abu Talhah. At the moment he raised the Makkan flag he shouted at the Muslims. "Do you pretend that your martyrs are in paradise and ours in hell? By God, you lie! If anyone of you truly believes such a story, let him come forward and fight with me." His challenge attracted Ali who killed him on the spot. The Banu Abd al Dar kept on carrying the Makkan flag until they lost nine men. (The Life of Muhammad)

Ali, the young lion, alone had killed eight standard-bearers of the idolaters of Makkah.

Ibn Atheer, the Arab historian, writes in his Tarikh Kamil "The man who killed the standard-bearers (of the pagans) was Ali." After the death

of the ninth of his standard-bearers, Abu Sufyan ordered his army to advance and to attack the Muslim formations. When the Prophet noticed the enemy moving, he also alerted the Muslims. He held a sword in his hand, and offered it to anyone who would bring honor to it. Some hopefuls moved toward him to take it but he withheld it from them.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

The Apostle wore two coats of mail on the day of the battle of Uhad, and he took up a sword and brandished it saying: "Who will take this sword with its right?" (use it as it ought and deserves to be used). Some men got up to take it but he withheld it from them until Abu Dujana Simak b. Kharasha, brother of B. Saida, got up to take it.

Umar got up to take it, saying: "I will take it with its right," but the Prophet turned away from him and brandished it a second time using the same words. Then Zubayr b. al-Awwam got up and he too was rejected, and the two of them were much mortified. (The Life of the Messenger of God)

The Prophet gave the sword to Abu Dujana, an Ansari. He took it and used it as it ought to have been used. He justified the confidence his master had placed in him. The Makkan women were squatting on top of their camels and were watching the swift action. When their army advanced to charge the Muslims, they also moved into action. They began to incite their warriors to kill the Muslims. They sang songs which were full of invitation and scorn – invitation to the heroes and scorn for the cowards. With their music and highly suggestive poetry, they whipped up the impetuous sons of the desert into fighting furies.

Betty Kelen

Perched on the summits of many camels were little huts, or howdahs, in which rode a squadron of women well trained by Hind to sing warlike ballads that would keep their menfolk in a fever pitch of rage and discourage cowardice.

The battle was joined. Hind and her women moved forward with the troops, scattering about the field as closely as they dared to the fighting men, beating their tambourines with terrible clash and shouting:

"Daughters of the shining Morning Star,
Watching you from silken beds we are,
Thrash them! in our arms we'll fold you;
Run, and nevermore we'll hold you."
(Muhammad, the Messenger of God)
Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Before Islam women (in Arabia) used to show themselves off not only to their husbands but to any other men they pleased. They used to go out into the open country singly or in groups and meet with men and youths without hindrance or sense of shame. They exchanged with them glances of passion and expressions of love and desire. This was done with such blaze frankness and lack of shame that Hind, wife of Abu Sufyan, had no scruples whatever about singing on such a public and grave occasion as the Day of Uhud.

"Advance forward and we shall embrace you!
Advance forward and we shall spread the carpets for you!
Turn your backs and we shall avoid you!
Turn your backs and we shall never come to you."

Among a number of tribes, adultery was not at all regarded as a serious crime. Flirting and courting were common practices. Despite the prominent position of Abu Sufyan and his society, the chroniclers tell, concerning his wife, a great many tales of love and passion with other men without implying any stain on her reputation… " (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

The Makkans had better equipment and they were more numerous than the Muslims. Furthermore, the presence, in the battlefield, of their deity, Hubal, and their women, was assurance that their morale would not sag, especially, after the latter had introduced into the struggle, the new and the deadly component of temptation.

But notwithstanding these tangible and intangible advantages, the Makkans were making little, if any, progress. In fact, at the beginning, the battle appeared to be going against them.

D. S. Margoliouth

It appears too that at the commencement events were going as the Prophet had imagined. The champions of Badr, Ali and Hamza, dealt out death as unsparingly as before; the heroism of the Kuraish compelled them to meet these champions in a series of single combats, in which their own champions were killed, and their overthrow spread discomfiture and panic. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

The charge of Ali, Hamza and Abu Dujana spread panic and consternation in the ranks of the Makkans, and they began to waver. The Muslims pressed their advantage.

Sir John Glubb

Ali ibn Abu Talib pressed on undismayed into the enemy ranks – it was Badr again; the Muslims were invincible. (The Great Arab Conquests, 1963)

Ali had broken the ranks of the Quraysh, and he was already deep inside their lines. Unable to resist his attack, they began to yield ground. Not far from him, his uncle, Hamza, was busy hacking his way through the dense mass of the enemy. Between them, they were grinding the army of Quraysh.

It was at this time that two incidents occurred which caused a reversal in the fortunes of the Muslims, and which wrested victory from their grasp. The first of them was the death of Hamza.

Hinda, the wife of Abu Sufyan, had brought with her from Makkah, a certain Wahshi, an Ethiopian slave, to kill Hamza, and had promised to give him not only his freedom but also much gold, silver and silk in the event of his success. He was noted for his skill in the use of his "national" weapon, the javelin.

Wahshi hid behind a rock awaiting an opportune moment, and it soon came. Just when Hamza killed an idolater, and lunged after another, Wahshi stood up, took deadly aim, and hurled the missile weapon against which there was no defense. The javelin caught Hamza in the groin. He fell on the ground and died almost immediately.

The other incident involved the main body of the army of Medina. The unsteadiness and the confusion of the army of Makkah had become very much visible at this time, and the Muslims assumed that they had already won a victory. In great anxiety not to miss the opportunity to plunder the enemy, they forgot their discipline. This maneuver was seen by the archers who had been posted by the Prophet at the strategic pass. They also imagined that the enemy had already been beaten, and was in retreat. They thought that if their comrades in the battle-field captured the baggage of the enemy, then they themselves would lose their share of the booty. This fear prompted them to descend into the plain below against the express orders of the Prophet. Their captain, Abdullah ibn Jubayr, adjured them not to abandon the pass but they paid no heed, and swept into the valley. Their love of booty cost the Muslims victory in the battle of Uhud!

Presently, a Makkan general, one Khalid bin al-Walid, noticed that the strategic pass to the left of the army of Medina was unguarded. He immediately seized the opportunity to attack the handful of the pickets still at the pass, with his cavalry. The pickets fought bravely but all of them including Abdullah ibn Jubayr, were overpowered, and were killed. Once Khalid captured the pass, he attacked the army of Medina from the rear.

The army of Medina was busy in gathering booty, utterly oblivious of everything else. Suddenly, it was startled by the charge of the Makkan cavalry in its rear. Abu Sufyan also noticed the maneuver of Khalid, and the bewilderment of the Muslims. He rallied his troops, returned to the scene of action and launched a frontal attack upon them. They now found themselves caught in a pincer movement of the enemy, and they panicked. It was now their turn to be routed. They started running but not knowing in what direction to run, and everyone ran every which way.

The surprise was not confined merely to the rank-and-file of the Muslim army; it was total. Some of the leading companions of the Prophet were also carried away with others before the charge of the enemy. Among the fugitives were both Abu Bakr and Umar. It is reported by Anas bin Nadhr, the uncle of Anas bin Malik, that Abu Bakr said in later times that when the Muslims fled from the battle of Uhud, and left the Messenger of God, he was the first one to return to him. Umar often said

that when the Muslims were defeated in Uhud, he ran and climbed up a hill (Tabari, History, vol. IV, p. 96). Some of the companions managed to reach Medina and others sought refuge in the mountain caves and gullies.

Uthman bin Affan, the future third khalifa of the Muslims, had not taken part in the battle of Badr but he was present in Uhud. However, he found the clangor of sword and spear a little too much for his nerves, and was among the first fugitives. Shaikh Muhammad Khidhri Buck says in his biography of the Prophet that Uthman was a bashful man, and that though he fled from the battle-field, he did not enter Medina. His bashfulness prevented him from doing so.

As the Muslims ran past the Prophet, he tried to stop them but no one seemed to listen. In a short time the tables were turned on them, and victory was wrenched out of their hands. It was the price they had to pay for their disobedience to their Prophet, and for their obsession with gathering booty.

Following is the testimony of Qur'an on the conduct of the Muslims in the battle of Uhud:

Behold! You were climbing up the high ground, without even casting a side glance at any one, and the Apostle in your rear was calling you back. there did God give you one distress after another by way of requital, to teach you not to grieve for the booty that had escaped you, and for (the ill) that had befallen you. For God is well aware of All that you do. (Chapter 3; verse 153)

The Prophet had given the banner of Islam to his uncle, Masaab ibn Umayr, in the battle of Uhud. He was killed by the enemy, and the banner of Islam fell on the ground. When Ali noticed the banner falling, he rushed forward, picked it up, and raised it high once again.

Washington Irving

Hamza was transfixed by the lance of Wahshi, an Ethiopian slave, who had been promised his freedom if he should kill Hamza. Mosaab ibn Omair, also, who bore the standard of Mohammed, was laid low, but Ali seized the sacred banner, and bore it aloft amidst the storm of battle.

As Mosaab resembled the Prophet in person, a shout was put up by the enemy that Mohammed was slain. The Koreishites were inspired with redoubled ardor at the sound; the Moslems fled in despair, bearing with them Abu Bakr and Omar, who were wounded. (The Life of Mohammed)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Those who thought that Muhammad had perished, including Abu Bakr and Umar, went toward the mountain and sat down. When Anas ibn al-Nadr inquired why they were giving up so soon, and was told that the Prophet of God had been killed, he retorted: "And what would you do with yourselves and your lives after Muhammad died? Rise, and die like he did." He turned, charged against the enemy, and fought gallantly (until he was killed). (The Life of Muhammad, 1935, Cairo)

Most of the Muslims had fled from the battle-field but Ali was still fighting. He was carrying the banner of Islam in one hand, and the sword in the other. He too heard the cry "Muhammad is dead." But it only made him more reckless of his own life.

The Prophet, however, was in another part of the battlefield. He had been wounded, and his head and face were bleeding. A few Muslims, mainly the Ansar, were defending him. It was this little group, and its battle cries that caught Ali's attention. He tore his way through the enemy lines and came up to his comrades-in-arms. They stood surrounding the Prophet, and led by Abu Dujana, were doing the best they could to shield him from the missile weapons of the enemy. Ali was thrilled to see his master alive but he had no time to exchange greetings. The idolaters had renewed their attacks, and now it was Ali who had to beat them back. They charged repeatedly but he repulsed them each time.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

… when somebody raised the cry that Muhammad was killed, chaos reigned supreme, Muslim morale plunged to the bottom and Muslim soldiers fought sporadically and purposelessly. This chaos was responsible for their killing of Husayl ibn Jabir Abu Hudhayfah by mistake, as everyone sought to save his own skin by taking flight except such men as

Ali ibn Abu Talib whom God had guided and protected. (The Life of Muhammad, 1935, Cairo)

In the battle of Uhud, many of the companions who were touted to be very brave and faithful, turned their backs upon the enemy, and ran for cover. But there were a few who did not run. One of them was Umm Ammarra Ansariyya, a lady from Medina. She was a fearless believer, and all Islam can be justly proud of her courage. She was noted for her skills as a surgeon and a nurse, and came to Uhud with the army of Medina.

At the beginning of the battle, Umm Ammarra brought water for the soldiers or tended them if they were wounded. But when the Muslims were defeated and they fled from the battle-field, her role changed from that of a nurse to that of a warrior. At one time the enemy brought archers to shower arrows upon the Prophet. Umm Ammarra seized an enormous shield and held it before him to protect him from the flying missiles.

Shortly later, the Makkans charged with swords and spears whereupon Umm Ammarra threw away the shield, and attacked them with a sword. One idolater came dangerously close to the Prophet but she came in front of him, and when he (the idolater) struck, the blow fell upon her shoulder. Though she was wounded, she was undismayed, and resolutely stood between the Prophet and his enemies, defying them and defying death.

Presently there was a momentary lull in fighting. Taking advantage of it, Ali took the Prophet away from the danger spot to a ravine where he could get some rest, and where his wounds could be dressed.

D. S. Margoliouth

The doughty Ali with (some) other brave men finding him (the Prophet) huddled him into a ravine where he could be tended. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam)

Fatima Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet, came from the city with a group of Muslim women when she heard the news of the defeat of the Muslims. Ali brought water in the hollow of his shield, and Fatima

Zahra washed blood from the face of her father, and dressed his wounds.

The Role of the Makkan Women

The rout of the Muslims from the battle-field was an invitation to the ladies from Makkah to seek and to find gratification of their blood-lust upon the bodies of the martyrs. They cut their noses, ears, hands and feet, and they cut open their abdomens, removed the organs, and made necklaces with them as trophies of war.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

Saleh bin Kaysan told me that Hind, daughter of Utba, and the women with her, mutilated the dead companions of the Prophet. They cut their ears and noses and Hind made them into anklets and collars and she gave her (own) anklets, collars and pendants to Wahshi, the slave of Jubayr b. Mutim. She cut out Hamza's liver and chewed it, but she could not swallow it and threw it away.

Al-Hulays b. Zabban, brother of the B. al-Harith b. Abdu Manat, who was then chief of the black troops, passed by Abu Sufyan as he was striking the corner of Hamza's mouth with the point of his spear, saying: "Taste that, you rebel." Hulays exclaimed, "O Banu Kinana, is this the chief of Quraysh acting thus with his dead cousin as you see?" (The Life of the Messenger of God)

Seventy-five Muslims were killed in the battle of Uhud, and bodies of most of them were mutilated by Hinda and the other harpies from Makkah.

The hatred of Muhammad, Ali and Hamza was a fire that consumed Hinda. Though Hamza alone was the victim of her cannibalistic appetites in the battle of Uhud, Muhammad and Ali could not expect any different treatment from her if they had fallen into her hands. She transmitted her hatred of Muhammad and Ali to her children and grandchildren, and the generations to come.

The Withdrawal of the Makkan Army

After the first shock of defeat had passed, some of the Muslims returned to the battle-field. Abu Bakr and Umar were among them. They also went into the ravine where Ali had taken the Prophet.

At this moment, Abu Sufyan who was ready to return to Makkah, is reported to have come near the ravine. Standing at the foot of the hills, he exchanged a few remarks with Umar.

Sir John Glubb

… the Quraish could have climbed Mount Uhud at the cost of a few casualties and possibly killed the Messenger of God and the little group of devoted followers who had remained with him. When Abu Sofian asked Umar ibn al-Khattab if Mohammed were dead, he had replied, "No, by God, he can hear you speaking." But it never occurred to Abu Sofian to take advantage of this dangerous breach of security.

The cold-blooded brutality of these killings (in the battle of Uhud) illustrates once more the extraordinary contrast between the easy-going and often chivalrous warfare of the Arabs and the brutalities of their blood-feuds. Abu Sofian talks familiarly with Umar ibn al-Khattab on the battle-field of Uhud, for neither had killed a relative of the other. But Abu Sofian's wife, Hinda, the daughter of Utba ibn Rabia, mutilates the dead body of Hamza, who had killed her father. (The Life and Times of Mohammed)

The Quraysh had, ostensibly accomplished their mission. They had defeated the Muslims and had salvaged their honor. Thus satisfied with themselves, they left the battle-field and marched toward their hometown in the south. But the Prophet, still not sure about their intentions, sent Ali to watch them from a distance and to report their movements to him.

Ali returned and informed the Prophet that the Quraysh had bypassed Medina, and were moving toward Makkah. This reassured the Prophet. The Muslims then descended from the hill, prayed over their dead, and buried them.

Ali and the Battle of Uhud

In the battle of Uhud, Ali killed the first standard-bearer of the pagan army. When the standard-bearer fell to the ground, the standard also fell with him. Ali thus felled the emblem of paganism.

Later, when the battle was raging, the pagans killed Masaab ibn Umayr, the standard-bearer of the army of Islam. Masaab fell to the ground, and the standard fell with him. But the very next moment, Ali was on the scene; he lifted the fallen banner from the ground, and unfurled it once again. He was thus as much a symbol of the destruction of idolatry and polytheism as he was the symbol of the rise and rebirth of Islam. In Uhud, friend and foe both beheld with their own eyes the fantastic deeds of Ali's heroism and chivalry, and his devotion to his master, Muhammad, the Messenger of God. Ali fought the battle of Uhud with the famous sword, Dhu'l-Fiqar.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

The Prophet's sword was called Dhu'l-Fiqar. A traditionalist told me that I. Abu Najih said, ‘Someone called out in the battle of Uhud:
There is no sword but Dhu'l-Fiqar
And there is no hero like Ali.'
(The Life of the Messenger of God)

In Ali's grip, Dhu'l-Fiqar was the lightning that struck and consumed paganism, idolatry and polytheism. But to Islam, it was the bringer of new hope, new vigor, new life, and honor, glory and victory. Commenting upon the events of Uhad, following the rout of the Muslims when the Prophet was beleaguered by his enemies, M. Shibli, the Indian historian, says:

It was a most critical moment in the history of Islam. The idolaters charged upon the Messenger of God like furies but each time they were repelled by the edge of the Dhu'l-Fiqar.

Shibli further says that the idolaters came like "dark and threatening clouds ready to burst upon the Muslims." If Ali had not blunted the Makkan offensive, then this cloudburst would have hit Medina, and Islam would have been carried away in the spate of idolatry. If Ali too had failed in his duty as many others did, the idolaters would have killed the Messenger of God, and they would have extinguished the

flame of Islam. But Ali and a handful of other Muslims, including Abu Dujana and Umm Ammarra Ansariyya, averted this catastrophe. In this lamentable battle, 75 Muslims were killed. Out of them four were Muhajirs, and the rest were Ansars.

The Martyrs of Uhad

The most tragic episode of the battle of Uhad was the death of Hamza and the mutilation of his body. After the departure of the Makkans, the Prophet went to see the corpse of his uncle. The ears and the nose had been cut; the abdomen had been slit open, and its organs had been removed. He was overwhelmed with sorrow to see the martyr's body in that state, and ordered it to be covered.

Hinda, the wife of Abu Sufyan and the mother of Muawiya, is called the "liver-eater" in the history of Islam. Ibn Ishaq says that she chewed up the liver of Hamza but could not swallow it. But Ibn Abdul Birr says in his book, Al-Isti'aab, that she actually made a fire in the battle-field, roasted Hamza's liver on it, and ate it!

When the Prophet returned to Medina, he heard the heart-rending lamentations of the members of the bereaved families. The kith and kin of the martyrs of Uhad were mourning their dead. He exclaimed: "Alas! there is no one to mourn the death of my uncle, Hamza." The leaders of the Ansar, upon hearing this remark, went to their homes, and ordered their women to go to the house of the Prophet, and lament the death of his uncle.

Presently a crowd of women of Medina gathered in the house of Muhammad, and they all wept over the tragic death of Hamza, the hero of Islam. The Prophet invoked the blessings of God upon them all. Thereafter it became a custom in Medina that whenever anyone died, his mourners began their lamentations with dirges on Hamza. The people of Medina mourned first for Hamza and then they mourned for their own dead.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

The Prophet passed by the quarters of the Banu Abdul Ashal and Zafar and he heard them wailing for the dead. His eyes filled with tears and he said: "But there are no weeping women for Hamza." When Sa’d

bin Mu'adh and Usayd b. Hudayr came back to the quarter, they ordered their women to gird themselves and to go and weep for the Prophet's uncle. (The Life of the Messenger of God)

Besides Hamza, three other Muhajirs won the crown of martyrdom in the battle of Uhad. They were Abdullah ibn Jahash, a cousin of the Prophet; Masaab ibn Umayr, an uncle of the Prophet; and Shams ibn Uthman. The losses of the Ansar were very heavy. They left seventy-one dead on the field, and many more wounded. May God bless them all.

The battle of Uhad was the climactic moment of pagan opposition to Islam. Though victorious in the battle, the Quraysh were unable to follow up and to exploit their victory, and their gains were soon dissipated.

Chapter 25

The Birth of Hasan and Husain

On the 15th of Ramadan of 3 A.H. (March 625), God was pleased to bless the daughter of His Messenger, Muhammad, with the birth of her first child. Muhammad Mustafa came radiating happiness; he took the infant in his arms, kissed him, read adhan in his right ear, and iqama in his left; and called him Hasan.

One year later, i.e., on the 3rd of Sha'aban of 4 A.H. (February 626), God was pleased to give the daughter of His Apostle, her second child. The Apostle came, all smiles and cheers, took the infant in his arms, kissed him, read adhan in his right ear, and iqama in his left, and called him Husain.

The birth of each of these two princes was the occasion of immense rejoicing for Muhammad. He considered them among the greatest of God's blessings, and thanked Him for them. At the birth of each of them, the Muslims poured into the Great Mosque to congratulate him. He greeted them with smiles and thanks, and shared his happiness with them.

There was never a day when the Prophet did not visit the house of his daughter to see her children. He loved to see them smile, so he tickled them and bounced them; he cuddled them and coddled them, and he regarded their every step and every word as wondrous.

When these two princes grew up a little, and were able to toddle around, they very frequently wandered out of their house into the Mosque. If their grandfather was in the midst of a sermon, he immediately stopped, descended from the pulpit, took them in his arms, carried them back, seated them beside himself on the pulpit, and then resumed his speech. If he was leading the public prayers, and was in sajdah

(resting his forehead on the ground), both children, very often, climbed onto his neck and back. He preferred to prolong the sajdah rather than to disturb them, and rose from sajdah only when they dismounted from his neck or back voluntarily. If he went out of his home or the Mosque, they rode his shoulders. The people of Medina called them "the Riders of the Shoulders of the Messenger of God." They were much more attached to him than they were to their own parents.

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, was never happier than when he was with Hasan and Husain. They were the apples of his eyes, and the joy of his heart, and in their company alone he found true and perfect relaxation. He played hide and seek with them, and if they were playing with other children, he lingered near them just to hear the lilt of their laughter. For their sake, he could put off even important affairs of state. When they smiled, he forgot all the burdens and anxieties of state and government. He loved to read every message that they wrote for him in their angelic smiles.

Earlier, the Messenger of God had brought up his own daughter, Fatima Zahra, whom he called the Lady of Heaven. Now he took charge of bringing up her two children – Hasan and Husain – whom he called the Princes of the Youth of Heaven. For him, their education was a matter of paramount importance, and he personally attended to every detail in it. His aim was clear: he wanted them to be the finest products of Islam, and they were. He built his own character into their character, and made them a model for his umma (community, people) which it (the umma) had to imitate to the end of time itself.

Ali and Fatima Zahra also had two daughters – Zaynab and Umm Kulthoom. When they grew up, they were married to their cousins – the sons of Jaafer ibn Abi Talib, the Winged Martyr of Islam. Zaynab was married to Abdullah ibn Jaafer, and Umm Kulthoom was married to Muhammad ibn Jaafer.

Hasan, Husain, Zaynab and Umm Kulthoom, all four children were pampered by their grandfather, Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of God; and the happiest days in the lives of all five of them were those which they spent

The Death of Fatima bint Asad, the Mother of Ali ibn Abi Talib

In 4 A.H. (A.D. 626) Fatima bint Asad, the widow of Abu Talib and the mother of Ali, died in Medina. She had reared Muhammad, the future Prophet, as her own son, and he called her his mother. She was the second lady in Arabia to accept Islam, the first being Khadija, the wife of the Prophet.

Muhammad was deprived of his mother early in life but he soon found a second mother in Fatima bint Asad. He, therefore, did not miss the love and affection that a mother alone can give. When his foster-mother died, he attended the funeral, and said: "May God bless your noble soul. You were to me like my own mother. You fed me while you yourself went hungry. Your aim in doing so was to please God with your deeds." He gave his own cloak for her shroud, and she was given burial in it. He often said, "I was an orphan and she made me her son. She was the kindest person to me after Abu Talib."

When the grave was made ready, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, entered it; he lay down in it, and said: "O God! Life and death are in Thy hands. Thou alone will never die. Bless my mother, Fatima bint Asad, and give her a mansion in Heaven. Thou art the Most Merciful."

When Fatima bint Asad was buried, Muhammad Mustafa repeated Allah-o-Akbar (God is Great) forty times, and prayed: "O God! Put her in the Light, and fill her heart with Light."

Muhammad Mustafa was the Executor of the last will and testament of Fatima bint Asad.

Fatima bint Asad was a most remarkable lady since two of the children she brought up, Muhammad and Ali, turned out to be the two most remarkable men in the history of Islam. Her home was the real cradle of Islam. Both Muhammad, the future Prophet of Islam, and Ali, the future paladin of Islam, were born in her house, and they grew up in it. Both of them were the "products" of her education.

Fatima bint Asad was also the mother of Jaafer, the hero of the battle of Mootah, and the Winged Martyr of Islam. The name of her husband, Abu Talib, figures in history as the greatest benefactor of Islam, but her role in the service of Islam was no less important than his. She shares the distinction with him of rearing and educating Muhammad, the future

Messenger of God. If her husband protected Muhammad from his enemies outside, she provided him love, comfort and security at home.It was in her home that Muhammad found emotional security and the emotional closeness of a family.

If Khadija was the first Muslim lady and the greatest benefactress of Islam, Fatima bint Asad was the second Muslim lady, and the second greatest benefactress of Islam. May God be pleased with His slaves, Khadija and Fatima bint Asad, and may He bless them.

Chapter 26

The Battle of the Trench

After the battle of Uhud, Abu Sufyan and the other pagan leaders realized that they had fought an indecisive action, and that their victory had not borne any fruits for them. Islam had, in fact, resiled from its reverse at Uhud, and within an astonishingly short time, had reestablished its authority in Medina and the surrounding areas.

The pagans considered Islam a threat to their economic security and political supremacy in Arabia, and they could never be reconciled to its existence. They knew that if they could kill Muhammad, their interests would be safeguarded, and their hegemony would be restored in Arabia. With this aim they decided to strike a final and a crushing blow upon Medina, and to exterminate all Muslims.

Montgomery

The strategic aim of the Meccans was nothing less than the destruction of the Muslim community as such, or – what amounts to the same thing – the removal of Muhammad from his position of authority (Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman)

Inspired by this aim, and by their ardor to make restitution for failures of the past, the Makkan leaders began preparations for an all-out war; a war that would put an end to all other wars by blotting Islam out!

In two years the Quraysh raised a fighting force of ten thousand warriors. This was the largest force ever assembled by the Arabs till that time. With great fanfare and aplomb, this formidable force left Makkah in February 627 to capture Medina and to obliterate Islam.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

When news of this tremendous mobilization reached Muhammad and the Muslims in Medinah, it struck them all with panic. The mobilization of the whole of Arabia against them instilled fear in their hearts as they faced the prospect of being not only defeated but wiped out. The gravity of the situation was evident in the fact that the army the Arab tribes had now raised surpassed in number and equipment anything the Peninsula had ever seen before… (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

The Prophet convened an emergency meeting of his principal companions to consult them in the matter of defending the city. One thing was obvious. The Muslims were so few in number and so poor in equipment that they could not meet the invading force on the open ground. Medina had to be defended from within. But how? How could the tiny Muslim garrison prevent the Makkan army from overrunning Medina which would be overwhelmed by sheer numbers, was a question on everyone's mind.

One of the closest friends of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, was Salman the Persian. He was born and brought up in Persia (Iran) but had spent many years in Syria and Palestine, and he had familiarity with the warfare and the siege operations of both the Persians and the Romans. Medina had natural or man-made defenses on three sides but was exposed on one, i.e., the north side. Salman told the Prophet that if a trench were dug on the north side, the city could perhaps be defended successfully.

The idea, though new and unconventional in Arabia, appealed to the Prophet. He accepted it and ordered Muslims to dig the trench.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Salman al-Farsi, who knew far more of the techniques of warfare than was common in the Peninsula, advised the digging of a dry moat around Medina and the fortifications of its buildings within. The Muslims hurried to implement this counsel. The moat was dug and the Prophet – may God's peace and blessings be upon him – worked with his hands alongside his companions lifting the dirt, encouraging the Muslim

workers, and exhorting everyone to multiply his effort. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Since the Makkan army was known to be approaching Medina rapidly, there was no time to lose, and the Muslims worked frantically – in relays. In six days the trench was dug, just in time to prevent the invaders from taking the town by assault.

The Makkan cavalry came like a whirlwind but was suddenly checked, in its career, by the trench. The horsemen reined in their horses at its edge. Their grand strategy had been to take Medina by storm in a few hours but now it appeared to them that they could not do so. Here there was a trench, a new obstacle which they could not surmount. How did it fit into their strategy? They were utterly nonplused by the trench.

Eventually, and after long deliberation, the Makkan commanders decided to lay siege to Medina, and to force the Muslims to surrender, through attrition. They sealed all exits from Medina, and hemmed in the Muslims. Medina was in a state of siege!

Though it was Abu Sufyan who had organized the whole campaign, and he was its director of operations, he was no fighting man himself. The fighting man of his army was Amr ibn Abd Wudd, the fiercest of the warriors of pagan Arabia. Abu Sufyan's hopes of a swift and decisive victory over the Muslims lay in him. M. Shibli, the Indian historian, and Abbas Mahmood Al-Akkad, the Egyptian historian, say that Amr ibn Abd Wudd was reckoned, by the Arabs of the time, to be more than a match for one thousand cavaliers.

Amr ibn Abd Wudd had no interest in the static warfare of a siege. He panted for action. When a few days had passed, and nothing had happened, he lost patience, and he decided to capture Medina by personal action. One day, prowling around Medina, he and three other Makkan knights discovered a rocky point where the trench was not too wide. They spurred their horses from it, and succeeded in clearing the trench!

Now Amr was inside the perimeter of Medina. He boldly advanced into the Muslim camp, and challenged the heroes of Islam to come out and fight against him in the classical Arabian tradition of duels.

Amr's first challenge went unanswered whereupon he repeated it but still got no answer. Such was the prestige of his name that no one in the Muslim camp dared to meet him in a trial of strength. If the idolaters saw in him their hope of victory, the Muslims saw in his challenge the sentence of their death.

Amr ibn Abd Wudd threw his insolent challenge a third time and taunted the Muslims at the same time for their cowardice.

To Amr it must have seemed that the Muslims were paralyzed with fear, which most of them, in fact, were. Al-Qur'an al-Majid has also drawn a portrait of the state of the Muslims at the siege of Medina in the following verses:

Behold! They came on you from above you and from below you, and behold, the eyes became dim and the hearts gaped to the throats, and you imagined various (vain) thoughts about God! (Chapter 33; verse 10)

Behold! A party among them said: "you men of yathrib! You cannot stand (the attack). Therefore go back" and a band of them asked for leave of the Prophet saying, "truly our houses are bare and exposed." Though they were not exposed: they intended nothing but to run away. (Chapter 33; verse 13)

Amr ibn Abd Wudd even expressed amazement that the Muslims were not showing any eagerness to enter paradise where he was ready to send them.

It is true that most of the Muslims were terror-stricken but there was one among them who was not. He had, in fact, volunteered to accept Amr's very first challenge but the Prophet had restrained him, hoping that someone else might like to face him (Amr). But he could see that no one dared to measure swords with him.

The young man who was willing to take up Amr's challenge was no one other than Ali ibn Abi Talib, the hero of Islam. When Amr hurled his third challenge, and no one answered him, Ali rose and solicited the Prophet's permission to go out and to fight against him.

The Prophet of Islam had no choice now but to allow his cousin, Ali, the Lion of Islam, to go and to silence the taunts and the jibes of Amr ibn Abd Wudd.

Ali put on the battle-dress of the Prophet of Islam. The latter himself suspended the Dhu'l-Fiqar to his side, and prayed for his victory, saying: "O Allah! Thou hast called to Thy service, Obaida ibn al-Harith, on the day the battle of Badr was fought, and Hamza ibn Abdul-Muttalib, on the day the battle of Uhud was fought. Now Ali alone is left with me. Be Thou his Protector, give him victory, and bring him back safely to me."

When the Prophet saw Ali going toward his adversary, he said: "He is the embodiment of all Faith who is going to an encounter with the embodiment of all Unbelief."

A few moments later, Ali was standing before Amr. The two heroes identified themselves, and sized up each other. Ali had a set of principles which he applied in all situations whether of war or of peace. In the battle of the Trench, the Muslims and the pagans saw a demonstration of the application of those principles. Whenever he confronted an enemy, he offered him three options. They were:

1.Ali presented Islam to his opponent. He invited him to abandon idolatry and to accept Islam. This invitation made Ali a missionary of Islam in the battlefield itself.

2.If the enemy did not accept Ali's invitation to accept Islam, he advised him to withdraw from the battle, and not to fight against God and His Messenger. Fighting against them, he warned him, would only bring eternal damnation upon him in the two worlds.

3.If the enemy did not accept the second option also, and refused to withdraw from the battle, then Ali invited him to strike the first blow. Ali himself was never the first to strike at an enemy.

Amr ibn Abd Wudd disdained even to consider the first and the second options but accepted the third, and struck a mighty blow with his ponderous sword which cut through the shield, the helmet and the turban of Ali, and made a deep gash in his forehead. Blood leapt out from the wound in a jet but Ali was not dismayed. He rallied, and then

struck a counter-blow with the famous Dhu'l-Fiqar, and it cleft the most formidable warrior of Arabia into two!

When Amr was killed, the three knights in his entourage turned round and spurred their horses to retreat. Ali let them retreat. It was one of his principles not to pursue a fleeing enemy. Whoever wished to save his life, Ali let him save it.

The death of Amr ibn Abd Wudd broke the back of the Makkan offensive against Islam, and destroyed their morale. The elements also declared against them. The temperature fell to freezing point, and a dust storm arose which blew in their faces. Discouraged and disheartened, the fickle tribesmen began to desert their Makkan allies, first in ones and twos and threes, and then in tens and twenties, and a little later, in hundreds. The confederacy began to dissolve visibly. Abu Sufyan was compelled to raise the siege, and to give the signal to his army to retreat from Medina. His army was dispersed, and his campaign was a dismal failure. Medina was saved.

The failure of the siege of Medina by the idolaters of Makkah was a most significant event in the history of Arabia. It meant that they would never be able to mount another invasion of Medina. After the battle of the Trench, the initiative passed, finally and unmistakably, from the polytheists of Makkah to the Muslims of Medina.

Medina and Islam had been saved by an idea and a hero. The idea was the trench which immobilized the Makkan cavalry. It was an entirely new concept in Arabian warfare, and the Arabs had no familiarity with it. Without the trench, the ten thousand marauding tribesmen would have overrun Medina, and they would have killed everyone in it. The honors for saving Medina-tunNabi, the City of the Prophet, and the Capital of Islam, go to Salman the Persian, and to his master, the Prophet himself. The former broached a new idea in military doctrine; the latter showed himself receptive to it, and immediately implemented it.

Everyone in Medina claimed that he was a friend or companion of Muhammad, the Messenger of God. That city had its own share of tuft-hunters. But there were a few, in fact very few, men whom Muhammad himself acknowledged as his friends. Salman the Persian belonged to this select group, the inner circle of the friends of the Messenger of God.

Salman was a man of gigantic stature and prodigious physical strength. When the trench was being dug, he worked as much as six other men. This prompted one of the Muhajireen to claim that Salman was one of them, i.e., the Muhajireen. But he was at once challenged by the Ansar one of whom said that Salman was an Ansar and not a Muhajir. The two groups were still arguing when the Apostle arrived on the scene. He too heard the claims of both sides and was amused by them. But he put an end to the argument by giving his own "verdict". He said that Salman was neither a Muhajir nor an Ansar but was a member of his own house – his Ahlul-Bait – a member of the House of Mohammed Mustafa himself!

The Arab historian, Ibn Atheer, has quoted the Prophet in his book, Tarikh Kamil, vol. 2, p. 122, as saying: "Salman is one of us. He is a member of our household." This is the greatest honor ever bestowed upon any of his companions by Muhammad, the Messenger of God.

Salman was a Christian living in Ammuria in Asia Minor when he first heard vague reports of the appearance of a prophet in Hijaz. To verify these reports, he came to Medina. When his first glance fell on the face of the Prophet, he exclaimed: "This cannot be the face of a man who has ever told a lie," and he forthwith accepted Islam.

Islam adopted Salman as much as he "adopted" Islam. Islam became the synthesis of his emotions, and he became a part of its "blood-stream." In Medina, a stranger once asked him the name of his father. His answer was: "Islam! The name of my father is Islam. I am Salman the son of Islam." Salman "blended" into Islam so thoroughly that he became indistinguishable from it.

The threat to the security of Medina, however, did not pass with the digging of the trench. Medina was still vulnerable. At a point where the trench was narrow, the general of the Makkan army and three other champions, were able to leap over it and to ride into the Muslim camp. If they had succeeded in establishing a bridgehead over the trench, the whole Makkan cavalry and infantry, and the irregular freebooters would have entered the city and captured it. But Ali checkmated them. Thus the wits of Salman, the sagacity of Muhammad and the sword of Ali proved

to be the best defense of Islam against the most formidable coalition of the polytheists in the history of Arabia.

It was a custom in Arabian warfare to rob a vanquished foe of his weapons, his armor and his horse. At the siege of Medina, Amr was wearing the finest armor in all Arabia. Ali killed him but did not touch anything that belonged to him to the great surprise of Umar bin al-Khattab. Later, when Amr's sister came to his corpse to mourn his death, she too was surprised to notice his weapons and armor intact. When she was told that it was Ali who had killed him, she composed some verses praising him (Ali). These verses have been quoted by the Egyptian historian, Abbas Mahmood Al-Akkad, in his book, Al-Abqariyyat Imam Ali (the Genius of Imam Ali), and can be roughly translated as follows:

"If someone other than Ali had killed Amr,
I would have mourned his death all my life.
But the man who killed him is a hero and he is peerless.
His father was also a lord."

Commenting upon these lines, Abbas Mahmood Al-Akkad says that a tribe did not consider it a disgrace if any of its heroes was killed by Ali. Ali was the most gallant and most chivalrous of foes, and also he was invincible.

After the failure of the siege of Medina, all the tribes between Medina and the Red Sea and between Medina and Yammama to the east, signed treaties of peace with the Prophet of Islam.

In the same year, i.e. in 5 A.H. (A.D. 627), Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah) was made mandatory for all those Muslims who were in good financial standing and were in good physical health.

Chapter 27

The Muslims and the Jews

In A.D. 70, the Roman general, Titus, captured Jerusalem and put an end to the Jewish rule of Palestine. Following the Roman conquest, many of the Jews left their homeland and wandered into other countries. Some Jewish tribes crossed the Syrian desert and entered the Arabian peninsula where they settled in Hijaz. In course of time they built up numerous colonies in Medina and between Medina and Syria. They are also said to have converted many Arabs to Judaism.

At the beginning of the seventh century A.D., there were three Jewish tribes living in Medina (Yathrib). They were Banu Qainuka'a, Banu Nadhir and Banu Qurayza. All three tribes were rich and powerful, and also, they were more civilized than the Arabs. Whereas the Arabs were all farmers, the Jews were the entrepreneurs of industry, business and commerce in Arabia, and they controlled the economic life of Medina (Yathrib). The two Arab tribes – Aus and Khazraj – were debt-ridden to the Jews perennially.

Besides Medina, the strong centers of the Jews in Hijaz were Khyber, Fadak and Wadi-ul-Qura. The lands in these valleys were the most fertile in all Arabia, and their Jewish cultivators were the best farmers in the country.

The migration of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, from Makkah to Medina (then Yathrib), brought him into contact with the Jews for the first time. At the beginning they were friendly to him. He granted them the famous Charter of Medina, and they acknowledged him the ruler of their city, and agreed to abide by his decisions in all disputes. They also agreed to defend the city in the event of an invasion by an enemy.

But, unfortunately, this friendship did not last long. It soon became obvious that the Jews had given their friendship to Muhammad with many reservations. In their own interest, they ought to have acted their part of the agreement faithfully but they did not. For this change in their attitude, there were many reasons, among them:

1. When Muhammad arrived in Medina, he reformed the life of the Arabs or whoever became a Muslim. He taught them to be temperate and moderate in everything, and taught them the value of discipline in life. They stopped drinking and gambling both of which were the causes of their ruin in the past; and they gave up taking loans at high rates of interest from the Jews. When the Arabs stopped taking loans and paying interest on them, a rich source of revenue suddenly dried up for the Jews, and they bitterly resented this. They could now see that their grip on the economic life of Medina was beginning to loosen.

2. The Jews also realized that Islam was an enemy of the system of exploitation, and of the capitalist system. They began to see Islam as a threat to their economic interests.

3. The Jewish priests hated Muhammad as much as the Jewish moneylenders. He had shown to the Jews how their priest followed deviant interpretations of their scriptures, and how they distorted their text. The priests, on their part, tried to convince their flocks that Muhammad did not have knowledge of their scriptures, and they tried to point out to them the "errors" in the Qur’an.

The Jews also believed that they were safe only as long as the two Arab tribes of Medina, the Aus and the Khazraj, were fighting against each other. Peace between the Aus and the Khazraj, they thought, would pose a threat to their survival in Arabia. For this reason, they were always fomenting trouble between them.

Of the three Jewish tribes of Medina, the Banu Qainuka'a and the Banu Nadhir had already been expelled after the battles of Badr and Uhud respectively, and they had left with all their baggage, and herds of animals, and had resettled in Khyber.

The third and the last tribe of the Jews in Medina was the Banu Qurayza. According to the terms of the Charter of Medina, it was their

duty to take an active part in defending the city during the siege of A.D. 627. But not only they did not contribute any men or materials during the siege but were actually caught conspiring with the enemy to compass the destruction of the Muslims. Some Jews even attacked a house in which many Muslim women and children had taken refuge as it was considered a safer place for them than their own houses. If Amr ibn Abd Wudd had overcome the resistance of the Muslims, the Jews would have attacked them from the rear. Between the pagans of Makkah and the Jews of Medina, the Muslims would have been massacred. It was only the presence of mind of Muhammad and the daring of Ali that averted such a disaster.

R.V.C. Bodley

The Jews were not at first inclined to listen to Abu Sofian's proposal (to attack Muslims from the rear), but after a while they compromised and agreed to betray the Moslems when the time seemed opportune. (The Messenger – the Life of Mohammed)

The conduct of the Jews during the siege of Medina was high treason against the State. Therefore, when the confederate army broke up and the danger to Medina was averted, the Muslims turned their attention to them.

The Jews shut themselves up in their forts and the Muslims besieged them. But some days later, they requested the Prophet to raise the siege, and agreed to refer the dispute to arbitration.

The Prophet allowed the Jews to choose their own arbitrator. Here they made a very costly blunder. They should have chosen Muhammad himself – the embodiment of mercy – to be their judge. If they had, he would have allowed them to depart from Medina with their baggage and their animals, and the incident would have been closed.

But the Jews didn't choose Muhammad as their judge. Instead, they chose Sa'ad ibn Muadh, the leader of their former allies, the Aus. Sa'ad was a man who was utterly reckless with life – his own as well as that of others.

Sa'ad had received a mortal wound during the battle of the Trench, and in fact died soon after he had passed judgment on the fate of the Jews. He declared treason to be an unpardonable offense, and his verdict was inexorable. He invoked the Torah, the Scripture of the Jews, and sentenced all men to death, and women and children to slavery. His sentence was carried out on the spot.

The Jews of the tribe of Qurayza were massacred in the spring of A.D. 627. From this date, the Jews ceased to be an active force in the social, economic and political life of Medina.

Chapter 28

The Treaty of Hudaybiyya

ACCORDING TO THE MUSLIM TRADITION, the Kaaba in Makkah was built by the Prophets Abraham and his son, Ismael. They consecrated it as the spiritual center of the world of the monotheists. And now Kaaba was the "Qibla" of the Muslims which means that they had to turn toward it when offering their prayers. But the custodians of the Kaaba were the idolaters of Makkah, and they were using it as the national pantheon of polytheism, housing in it 360 idols of their tribes.

By ancient Arab custom, everyone was free to visit the Kaaba – unarmed. Also, by ancient custom, fighting of any kind was prohibited during the four sacred months of the year. One of these months was Zilqa'ada, the 11th month of the calendar.

The Muslims longed to see what for them was the House of God. Therefore, in Zilqa'ada of the sixth year after the Migration, their Prophet declared that he would visit Makkah to perform Umra or the Lesser Pilgrimage – unarmed but with his followers. With this intent, he left Medina in late February A.D. 628 with 1400 of his followers. They had taken camels and other animals for sacrifice but no weapons except their swords.

When this caravan of the pilgrims reached the outskirts of Makkah, the Prophet was informed that the idolaters would not allow him to enter the city, and that, they would use force to prevent him from doing so. This report caused great agitation among the Muslims. They halted near a well in a place called Hudaybiyya in the north of Makkah. The Prophet sent a message to the Quraysh that he wished only to make the customary seven circuits of the Kaaba, sacrifice the animals, and then return to Medina, with his followers. The Quraysh did not agree. Many

other messages were sent but the Quraysh said that they would not admit the Muslims into Makkah.

Eventually, the Prophet ordered Umar bin al-Khattab to go to Makkah to explain to the idolaters the purpose of the visit of the Muslims, to assure them that they (the Muslims) had no intention of fighting against anyone, and to give them a pledge that after performing the rites of Umra they would leave Makkah immediately and would return to Medina.

But Umar refused to go. He said that there was no one in Makkah to protect him. He suggested, however, that the Prophet ought to send Uthman bin Affan with his message to Makkah since the idolaters would not do him any harm.

Sir William Muir

The first messenger from the Moslem camp to Mecca, a convert from the Beni Khozaa, the Coreish had seized and treated roughly; they maimed the Prophet's camel on which he rode, and even threatened his life. But the feeling was now more pacific, and Mohammed desired Umar to proceed to Mecca as his ambassador. Umar excused himself on account of the personal enmity of the Coreish towards him; he had, moreover, no influential relatives in the city who could shield him from danger; and he pointed to Othman as a fitter envoy.
(The Life of Mohammed, 1877)

S. Margoliouth

Presently it was determined to send a representative to Mecca, but the consciousness that most of the Moslems were stained with Meccan blood, rendered the heroes of Islam unwilling to risk their lives on such an errand; even Omar, ordinarily so ready with his sword, hung back. At last the Prophet's son-in-law, Othman s/o Affan, who had preferred nursing his wife to fighting at Badr, was sent as a grata persona.. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, 1931)

It is really strange that Umar was unwilling to risk his life by visiting Makkah. There was no risk involved for him because he was not one of those Muslims who were "stained with Meccan blood." Since Umar had

not killed any Makkan, he would be grata persona with the idolaters at all times. His refusal to obey the command of the Messenger of God, therefore, is incomprehensible.

Umar did not go to Makkah. Nevertheless, he solved the problem by producing his stand-in, Uthman bin Affan. Instead of him, therefore, Uthman was sent to Makkah to parley with the Quraysh. Like Umar himself, Uthman also was not stained with any pagan blood.

The idolaters welcomed Uthman and told him that he was free to perform the Umra. But he said that he alone could not perform Umra, and that they had to admit the Prophet and all the Muslims with him, into the city. This was not acceptable to the Quraysh, and it was reported that they had arrested him. It was even rumored that they had killed him.

When the rumors of Uthman's execution reached the Prophet, he construed the action of the Quraysh as an ultimatum, and asked the Muslims to renew their pledge of fealty to him. All Muslims pledged their obedience to the Messenger of God regardless of the events which might take place thenceforth.

This pledge is called the "Pledge of Ridhwan" or the "Covenant of Fealty," and those Muslims who gave it, are called the "Companions of the Tree," because the Prophet of Islam stood under a tree as they filed past him renewing their oath of allegiance to him. Their numbers are given as 1400.

The resolution of the Muslims to dare the consequences appears to have put the Quraysh in a more reasonable frame of mind, as they realized that their intransigence could lead to unnecessary bloodshed. Uthman, it turned out, had not been killed as it had been rumored but had only been arrested, and now they released him – an act reflecting a change in their attitude. Also reflective of this change was the selection by them of one, Suhayl bin Amr, whom they sent to the camp of the Muslims to conclude a treaty with the Prophet of Islam. Suhayl was a man known to be a skillful but not an inflexible negotiator.

Suhayl arrived in Hudaybiyya and opened negotiations with Muhammad, the Messenger of God. After long and wearisome

discussions and debate they succeeded in hammering out a treaty, the more important terms of which were as follows:

1. Muhammad and his followers would return to Medina without performing Umra (the Lesser Pilgrimage) of the current year.

2. There would be peace between the Muslims and the Quraysh for a period of ten years from the date of the signing of the treaty.

3. If any Makkan accepts Islam and seeks sanctuary with the Muslims in Medina, they would extradite him to Makkah. But if a Muslim, fleeing from Medina, seeks sanctuary with the pagans in Makkah, they would not extradite him.

4. All the tribes of Arabia would be free to enter into treaty relations with any party – the Muslims or the Quraysh.

5. The Muslims would visit Makkah to perform the pilgrimage in the following year but they would not stay in the city for more than three days, and the only weapons which they would be allowed to bring with them, would be their swords in the scabbards.

This treaty is called the Treaty of Hudaybiyya. It is the most important political document in the history of Islam. The secretary selected to indite its terms was Ali ibn Abi Talib.

When the Treaty of Hudaybiyya was being indited, an incident took place which throws a revealing sidelight upon the character of the various protagonists engaged in drafting its terms.

Dictating to Ali, the Prophet said: "Write, In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Beneficent." Suhayl, the Makkan envoy, at once raised objection, and said, "Do not write this. Instead, write, ‘In Thy name O Allah.'" The Prophet complied with this demand.

The Prophet next asked Ali to write: "This is a treaty of peace between Muhammad, the Messenger of God and the Quraysh… " Suhayl again objected, and said: "If we had acknowledged you a messenger of God, why would we be fighting against you? Therefore, do not write the

words, ‘the Messenger of God,' and write only your own name and the name of your father."

The Prophet was agreeable to comply with this demand also but Ali had already written the words, "Muhammad, the Messenger of God," and he refused to delete them. He said to his master: "This high rank has been bestowed upon you by Allah Himself, and I shall never delete the words ‘Messenger of Allah' with my hand." Thereupon, the Prophet took the pen in his own hand, and deleted the words which were offensive to the idolaters.

The Treaty of Hudaybiyya was signed on two copies, one for each party.

R.V.C. Bodley

The original of the Treaty of Hudaybiyya was retained by Mohammed while the duplicate was handed to Suheil for safekeeping in the archives of Mecca. (The Messenger – the Life of Mohammed, 1946)

In Makkah the leaders of the Quraysh hailed the Treaty of Hudaybiyya as a triumph of their diplomacy. They assumed that Muhammad had at last been outmaneuvered, and that the treaty was tantamount to, even if it was not a formal declaration of, "surrender." The Quraysh gloated over what they fancied to be the surrender of the enemy but events were soon to show that they were wrong. Far from being a surrender, the Treaty of Hudaybiyya was one of the greatest triumphs of Islam.

Among the followers of the Prophet, however, the Treaty of Hudaybiyya was to produce some violent allergic reactions. Oddly, just like the pagans of Makkah, the "chauvinists" in the Muslim camp also equated it with "surrender." They were led by Umar bin al-Khattab. He considered its terms "dishonorable," and he was so much distressed by them that he turned to Abu Bakr for answers to his questions, and the following exchange took place between them:

Umar: Is he (Muhammad) or is he not the Messenger of God?
Abu Bakr: Yes. He is the Messenger of God.
Umar: Are we or are we not Muslims?

Abu Bakr: Yes, we are Muslims

Umar: If we are, then why are we surrendering to the pagans in a matter relating to our faith?

Abu Bakr: He is God's Messenger, and you must not meddle in this matter.

But Umar's defiance only escalated another notch after the admonition by Abu Bakr, and he went to see the Prophet himself. He later said: "I went into the presence of the Prophet, and asked him: 'Are you not the Messenger of God?' He answered, 'Yes, I am.' I again asked: 'Are we Muslims not right, and are the polytheists not wrong?' He replied: 'Yes, that is so.' I further asked: 'Then why are we showing so much weakness to them? After all we have an army. Why are we making peace with them?' He said: 'I am the Messenger of God, and I do whatever He commands me to do.'"

But it appears that Umar was not satisfied even with the answers of the Prophet himself to his questions. The terms of the Treaty of Hudaybiyya had generated grave doubts in his mind, so he said: "I repeatedly questioned the Prophet regarding the terms of this treaty, and I had never before talked with him in this manner."

Sir John Glubb

Many of the Muslims were disappointed at the outcome of Hudaybiyya, having anticipated a triumphant entry into Mecca. Umar ibn al-Khattab, as usual, voiced his indignation. 'Is he not God's Apostle and are we not Muslims and are they not polytheists?' he demanded angrily from the quiet and faithful Abu Bakr. 'Why not fight them; why compromise thus?' (The Great Arab Conquests)

Tor Andre

Umar turned excitedly to Abu Bakr and other leaders who were near the Prophet to ascertain whether they really intended to submit to this humiliation (sic). He declared later that never before had he such doubts concerning Mohammed's truthfulness, and if he had found merely a hundred like-minded men, he would have resigned from the umma of Islam. (Mohammed – the Man and his Faith)

Maxime Rodinson

Umar and some others were angry at the idea of treating with these pagans. The future caliph came to upbraid the Prophet. He declared later that if he had a hundred men on his side, he would have seceded. But Muhammad was immovable. (Muhammad,translated by Anne Carter)

R.V.C. Bodley

Most of the pilgrims, and Omar especially, were deeply mortified that Mohammed had given in to the Koreishites on practically every point. It seemed incredible to them that, after being brought all this way by their leader who had not been afraid to pursue an enemy which had defeated him, they should be halted outside their objective. It seemed even more incredible that he should humiliate himself before the Meccan envoy to the extent of neither calling his God by His rightful name nor using his own title, merely because the infidel had so demanded. Omar went as far as to ask: "Are you really God's messenger?"

Omar went to see what the other Moslems felt. He found them much in the same frame of mind as he. For the first time since Islam had come into being, there were signs of revolt. (The Messenger – the Life of Mohammed)

Umar declared later that ever since he accepted Islam, he had never had such doubts about the truthfulness of Muhammad as he had on the day the Treaty of Hudaybiyya was signed.

This means that Umar was assailed by doubts from time to time about the truthfulness of Muhammad and his prophetic mission. He probably repressed them each time when they surfaced. But at the touchstone issue of the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, his chronic doubts erupted with such terrific force that he could not suppress them. Haunted by his doubts, he actually considered leaving the fraternity of Islam itself but could not find anyone in the camp who would give him moral support in his "enterprise."

The traditional Sunni line has been that in showing defiance and insolence to Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and his Ahlul-Bait), Umar was prompted by his love of Islam.

According to them, he loved Islam so much that he was "carried away." Earlier, he had refused to obey the Prophet's order to carry a message to the Quraysh in Makkah. That refusal, probably, was also prompted by the same love.

Those people who attribute Umar's histrionics to his love for Islam, are, in fact, suggesting that he loved Islam more than Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, himself did! Also, by his conduct, he was suggesting that God's Messenger was wrong in seeking peace with the Quraysh but he himself was right, and that it was his duty to "correct" him (Muhammad Mustafa).

Only a day or so earlier, Umar had taken an oath to "obey the Messenger of God" through thick and thin, in peace and in war, in prosperity and in adversity. It was perhaps this pledge that impelled him to show himself more "royalist" than the "king" himself!

If it is a coincidence that both the Quraysh in Makkah, and Umar and his supporters in the Muslim camp, read in the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, the "surrender" of the Muslims, then it was truly remarkable. But if Umar's saber-rattling that day had led to a showdown with the Quraysh, then one can surmise what part he would have played in it, judging by his own "track record" both before and after.

Writing about the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, Lt. General Sir John Glubb says in his book, The Life and Times of Mohammed:

The anxieties endured by the Muslims at Hudaybiyya are emphasized by the way in which those days of suspense remained etched on their memories. Many years after, when the Muslim armies had already built up a great empire, when veteran comrades spoke of the early days, the deepest respect was always shown to the men who had fought at Badr and to those who had taken the oath at Hudaybiyya – the two most tense crises of the rise of Islam. (The Life and Times of Mohammed)

There was no one among all the companions of Muhammad Mustafa who acquitted himself so honorably, both in the battle of Badr and at Hudaybiyya, and in fact, in all the critical moments in the history of Islam, as Ali ibn Abi Talib. In the past, he had shown himself to be the first in war; in Hudaybiyya everyone saw that he was also the first in

peace. He had demonstrated many times in war that he had absolute trust in Muhammad and his mission, and now he was demonstrating in peace that there was nothing that could ever shake his faith in his master.

After the departure of the Makkan emissaries, the Prophet ordered the Muslims to shave their heads and to offer their animals as sacrifice, as rites of Umra. But he was shocked to notice that many of them were in a rebellious mood and did not want to obey his commands.

What actually had happened was that Umar had publicly defied the Apostle of God, and by his example, he had encouraged his followers also to do the same. The Apostle entered his tent, and told his wife that the Muslims were disobeying his orders. She said that if he ignored them, and performed the operations himself, they would follow him.

S. Margoliouth

The Moslems were sulkily silent when told by him (the Prophet) to shave their heads and offer their sacrifices. At last (by the advice of his wife, Umm Salamah), he performed the operations himself, and his followers did the same.
(Mohammed and the Rise of Islam)

His mission accomplished, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, left Hudaybiyya with the pilgrims, to return to Medina. He was still at seven days' journey from Medina, when the following revelation came from Heaven:

Verily we have granted thee a manifest victory (Chapter 48; verse 1)

It was the Treaty of Hudaybiyya that the new revelation called "The Manifest Victory."

Amin Dawidar, the Egyptian historian, writes in his book Pictures From the Life of the Prophet (Cairo, 1968, p. 465) that when the Messenger of God promulgated this latest revelation called "Victory," Umar bin al-Khattab came to see him, and asked: "Is this what you call a Manifest Victory?" "Yes," said the Messenger of God, "by Him in Whose hands is my life, this is the Manifest Victory."

The Treaty of Hudaybiyya was truly the "Manifest Victory" as the unfolding drama of history was to reveal, notwithstanding the reservations about it of many Muslims in the camp of the Prophet.

Muhammad Mustafa was the Apostle of Peace. If he had yielded to the pressures of the "chauvinists" in his camp to use strong-arm methods, his whole mission would have been compromised, and the generations of the future would have indicted him for his love of "aggression." But he resisted pressures to appeal to the arbitration of arms, and instead, appealed to the arbitration of peace, and achieved results which no military victory could have gained.

The Treaty of Hudaybiyya was a product of inspired statesmanship and political genius of the highest order. It brought immense advantages to Islam. Among them:

1. The Quraysh of Makkah acknowledged Muhammad as an equal. Heretofore, they had considered him a rebel and a fugitive from their vengeance.

2. By signing the treaty, the Quraysh gave tacit recognition to the nascent Islamic State of Medina.

3. Those Muslims who were in Makkah, concealed their faith from the idolaters for fear of persecution by them. But after the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, they began to practice Islam publicly.

4. Till 6 A.H., Muhammad, the Messenger of God, had been locked up in a ceaseless struggle with the pagan Arabs and the Jews, and there had been no opportunity for them to see Islam in action. After the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, they could "appraise" Islam for the first time. This "appraisal" led to the conversion of many of them, and Islam began to spread rapidly. The Treaty of Hudaybiyya opened the gates of proselytization.

5. Many Arab tribes, though still heathen, wanted to enter into treaty relations with the Muslims but felt inhibited by the opposition of the Quraysh. Now they were freed to make alliances with the Muslims.

6. The Treaty of Hudaybiyya is the best answer to those critics who allege that Islam was spread on the point of the sword. There is no better

proof than this Treaty of the repudiation, by Muhammad, of war, as an instrument of policy, and of his genuine love of peace. The pagan Arabs were strongly influenced by the Qurayshite propaganda that Muhammad lusted for war. Now they could see with their own eyes that Muhammad retired to Medina without even a "quid pro quo," even though he had an army with him, and even though he had defeated the Quraysh twice – in 624 and 627.

The Treaty of Hudaybiyya also points up the aversion of Qur'an for war. Before the treaty, the Muslims had won the two historic battles of Badr and Ahzab (Trench). If they had been defeated in either of them, Islam would have vanished for all time from the face of the earth. Victory in both of these battles guaranteed the physical survival of Islam. And yet, Al-Qur'an al-Majid didn't call either of them a manifest victory. In the sight of Qur'an, among all the campaigns of Muhammad, the Treaty of Hudaybiyya alone was the Manifest Victory.

The Treaty of Hudaybiyya was the prelude to the victory of Islam over the forces of paganism, polytheism, idolatry, ignorance, injustice and exploitation. Umar bin al-Khattab had bridled at the third clause of the Treaty since it was not reciprocal; but it was precisely this clause that put the Quraysh on the defensive almost immediately, and they came a-begging to the Prophet to repeal it.

Eighteen months after the signing of the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, marched into Makkah, as a conqueror, and he was accompanied by ten thousand believers. The conquest of Makkah was a direct result of this Treaty.

Because of these results, many historians have rightly called the Treaty of Hudaybiyya the tour de force of Muhammad's statesmanship.

Marmaduke Pickthall

There was dismay among the Muslims at these terms (the terms of the Treaty of Hudaybiyya). They asked one another: 'Where is the victory that we were promised?' It was during the return journey from Al-Hudeybiyah that the surah entitled Victory was revealed. This truce proved, in fact, to be the greatest victory that the Muslims had till then achieved. War had been a barrier between them and the idolaters, but

now both partners met and talked together, and the new religion spread more rapidly. In the two years which elapsed between the signing of the truce and the fall of Mecca, the number of converts was greater than the total number of all previous converts. The Prophet traveled to Al-Hudeybiyah with 1400 men. Two years later, when the Meccans broke the truce, he marched against them with an army of 10,000. (Introduction to the translation of Holy Qur'an, 1975)

Two important principles of Islam can be seen in their application in the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, viz.

1. War must be eschewed at all costs unless it is absolutely inevitable. Solution of all problems must be sought and found through peaceful means, without, of course, compromising with the principles of Islam. To the pagans and to many Muslims, it had appeared that Muhammad, the Messenger of God, had given "carte blanche" to Suhayl, the Makkan emissary, so that he (Suhayl), in a sense, dictated his own terms. Notwithstanding such appearances, Muhammad had accepted those terms. Of course, there was no compromise with any principle. It was unthinkable that the Prophet of Islam would compromise with any principle of Islam

2. A Messenger of God does not have to defer to the opinions or wishes of his followers, or of the people in general. An overwhelming majority of the companions of Muhammad had been opposed to the signing of the Treaty of Hudaybiyya. But he ignored their opposition, and went ahead and signed it. He, in fact, did not even seek the advice of any of them in the matter. From beginning to end, he was guided, not by the wishes of the "people" or by the wishes of the "majority" of the people but only by the commandments of God, enshrined in His Book, specifically in the following verse:

So judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the truth that hath come to thee… (Chapter 5; verse 51)

Chapter 29

The Conquest of Khyber

Khyber is a township 90 miles north of Medina, in a harra or volcanic tract, well-watered with many springs issuing forth from its basaltic rocks. It has an excellent irrigation system and produces rich harvests of dates and grain.

Long before the time of the Prophet of Islam, the valley of Khyber and other valleys in its north and south, were colonized by the Jews. As noted before, these Jews were not only the best farmers of the country, they were also its leaders in industry and business, and they enjoyed a monopoly of the armaments industry.

In the times of the Prophet, the best arsenals of Arabia were all in Khyber. Those Jews who had been banished from Medina, had also resettled in Khyber, and they were noted for their skills in metallurgy.

Betty Kelen

The Qaynuqa were banished from Medina. Chiefly they were metal-workers, having learned the art of beating out the splendid shining armor, the moon-curved swords and sun-catching helmets that glorified warfare in the desert. They made fine bronze armor, beaten and burnished, with helmets to match and gleaming swords whose swift cut could make the very air whistle. (Muhammad – the Messenger of God)

The Jews of Khyber also heard about the Treaty of Hudaybiyya and its terms. Just as the Quraysh in Makkah and Umar bin al-Khattab and some other "hawks" among the Muslims in Medina had interpreted the treaty as the "surrender" of the Muslims, so also did the Jews of Khyber consider it a symptom of the incipient decline of the power of the State of

Medina. Banking on this theory of "decline," they began to instigate the Arab tribes between Khyber and Medina to attack the Muslims. One of these tribes was the Ghatafan, the allies of the Jews of Khyber.

They began to send their raiding expeditions into the pastures around Medina. One of these pastures belonged to the Prophet himself. On one occasion, the son of Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari was grazing the camels of the Prophet when the Ghatafan struck. They killed him, and captured his mother who was with him, and they drove with them the herd of camels. The Muslims, however, were able, just in time, to overtake the marauders and to rescue the wife of Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari.

Muhammad decided to put an end to these gratuitous provocation. He thought that it would not be prudent to wait until the Jews and their allies laid another siege to Medina, and that it would be better to forestall them. He, therefore, ordered the Muslims to mobilize, and to march on Khyber.

In September 628 the Prophet left Medina with 1600 soldiers. Some Muslim women also accompanied the army to work as nurses and to give first aid to the wounded and the sick.

Khyber had eight fortresses. The strongest and the most important of them all was the fortress of al-Qamus. The captain of its garrison was a famous champion called Merhab. He had, under his command, the best fighting men of Khyber, and they were the best-equipped soldiers of the time in all Arabia.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

The campaign of Khaybar was one of the greatest. The masses of Jews living in Khaybar were the strongest, the richest, and the best equipped for war of all the peoples of Arabia. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

The Muslims, however, were able to capture all the fortresses of Khyber except al-Qamus which proved to be impregnable. Muhammad send Abu Bakr on one occasion, and Umar on another, with hand-picked warriors, to attempt the conquest of al-Qamus. Both made the attempt and both failed. Some other captains also tried to capture the fortress but

they also failed. These repeated failures began to undermine the morale of the army.

Muhammad realized that something dramatic had to be done to restore the wilting morale of the Muslims, and immediately. And when one more attempt to capture al-Qamus had also aborted, his mind was made up, and he declared: "Tomorrow I shall give the banner of Islam to a hero who loves God and His Apostle, and God and His Apostle love him. He is one who attacks the enemy but does not run, and he will conquer Khyber."

The companions knew that the prediction of the Messenger of God would come true, and that Khyber would be conquered on the following day. Everyone of them, therefore, became a candidate for the glory and honor of conquering it. Many of them were kept awake all night by the ambition to become "the beloved of God and His Apostle," and to become the hero who would capture Khyber.

On the following morning, the companions gathered in front of the tent of the Prophet. Each of them was decked out in martial array, and was vying with others in looking the most impressive figure.

Presently, the Messenger of God came out of his tent, and the vast throng began to show signs of restlessness. Each of the companions tried to make himself more conspicuous than others in the hope of catching the eye of the master. But the latter didn't appear to notice any of them and only posed one question: "Where is Ali?"

Ali at this time was in his tent. He knew that if he was the "beloved of God and His Apostle," then he, and no one else would capture the fortress of al-Qamus. The Prophet sent for him.

When Ali came, the Prophet solemnly placed the banner of Islam in his hand. He invoked God's blessings upon him, prayed for his victory, and bade him farewell. The young hero then advanced toward the most formidable fortress in all Arabia where the bravest of the Hebrew warriors were awaiting him. He fought against them all, overcame them, and planted the banner of Islam on its main tower.

When the conqueror returned to the camp, the Messenger of God greeted him with smiles, kisses and embraces, and prayed to God to bestow His best rewards upon His lion.

Ibn Ishaq

Burayda b. Sufyan b. Farwa al-Aslami told me from his father Sufyan b. Amr b. Al-Akwa: the Apostle sent Abu Bakr with his banner against one of the forts of Khyber. He fought but returned having suffered losses and not taken it. On the morrow he sent Umar and the same thing happened. The Apostle said: "Tomorrow I will give the flag to a man who loves Allah and His Apostle. Allah will conquer it by his means. He is no runaway." Next day he gave the flag to Ali. (The Life of the Messenger of God)

Edward Gibbon

North-east of Medina, the ancient and wealthy town of Khyber was the seat of the Jewish power in Arabia: the territory, a fertile spot in the desert, was covered with plantations and cattle, and protected by eight castles, some of which were esteemed of impregnable strength. The forces of Mohammed consisted of 200 horse and 1400 foot: in the succession of eight regular and painful sieges, they were exposed to danger and fatigue, and hunger; and the most undaunted chiefs despaired of the event. The Apostle revived their faith and courage by the example of Ali, on whom he bestowed the surname of the Lion of God, perhaps we may believe that a Hebrew champion of gigantic stature was cloven to the chest by his irresistible scimitar; but we cannot praise the modesty of romance, which represents him as tearing from its hinges the gate of a fortress and wielding the ponderous buckler in his left hand (sic). (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

Washington Irving

The city of Khyber was strongly defended by outworks, and its citadel, Al-Kamus, built on a steep rock, was deemed impregnable. The siege of this city was the most important enterprise the Moslems had yet undertaken. When Mohammed came in sight of its strong and frowning walls, and its rock-built citadel, he is said to have prayed for Lord's succor in capturing it.

The siege of the citadel lasted for some time, and tasked the skill and patience of Mohammed and his troops, as yet little practiced in the attack of fortified places. Mohammed directed the attacks in person; the besiegers protected themselves by trenches, and brought battering-rams to play upon the walls; a breach was at length effected, but for several days every attempt to enter was vigorously repelled. Abu Bakr at one time led the assault, bearing the standard of the Prophet; but, after fighting with great bravery, was compelled to retreat. The next attack was headed by Omar ibn Khattab, who fought until the close of day with no better success.

A third attack was led by Ali, whom Mohammed armed with his own scimitar, called Dhu'l-Fiqar, or the Trenchant. On confiding to his hands the sacred banner, he pronounced him "a man who loved God and His Prophet; and whom God and His Prophet loved; a man who knew not fear, nor ever turned his back upon a foe."

And here it may be well to give a traditional account of the person and character of Ali. He was of the middle height, but robust and square, and of prodigious strength. He had a smiling countenance, exceedingly florid, with a bushy beard. He was distinguished for an amiable disposition, sagacious intellect, and religious zeal, and, from his undaunted courage, was surnamed the Lion of God.

Arabian writers dwell with fond exaggeration on the exploits of Khyber, of this their favorite hero. He was clad, they say, in a scarlet vest, over which was buckled a cuirass of steel. Scrambling with his followers up the great heap of stones in front of the breach, he planted the standard on the top, determined never to recede until the citadel was taken. The Jews sallied forth to drive down the assailants. In the conflict which ensued, Ali fought hand to hand with the Jewish commander, Al-Hareth, whom he slew. The brother of the slain advanced to revenge his death. He was of gigantic stature; with a double cuirass, a double turban, wound round a helmet of proof, in front of which sparked an immense diamond. He had a sword girt to each side, and brandished a three-pronged spear, like a trident. The warriors measured each other with the eye, and accosted each other in boasting oriental style. "I," said the Jew, "am Merhab, armed at all points, and terrible in battle." "And I am Ali, whom his mother, at his birth, surnamed Al-Haider (the rugged lion).

The Moslem writers make short work of the Jewish champion. He made a thrust at Ali with his three pronged lance, but it was dexterously parried; and before he could recover himself, a blow from the scimitar, Dhu'l-Fiqar divided his buckler, passed through the helm of proof, through double turban, and stubborn skull, cleaving his head even to his teeth. His gigantic form fell lifeless to the earth.

The Jews now retreated into the citadel, and a general assault took place. In the heat of the action the shield of Ali was severed from his arm, leaving his body exposed; wrenching a gate, however, from its hinges, he used it as a buckler through the remainder of the fight.

Abu Rafe, a servant of Mohammed, testified to the fact: "I afterwards," says he, "examined this gate in company with seven men and all eight of us attempted in vain to wield it."

(This stupendous feat is recorded by the historian Abul Fida. "Abu Rafe," observes Gibbon, "was an eye-witness; but who will be witness for Abu Rafe?" We join with the distinguished historian in his doubt yet if we scrupulously question the testimony of an eye-witness, what will become of history?) (The Life of Mohammed)

Sir William Muir

The Jews rallied round their chief Kinana and posted themselves in front of the citadel Camuss, resolved on a desperate struggle. After some vain attempts to dislodge them, Mohammed planned a general attack. "I will give the eagle," he said – the great black eagle – "into the hands of one that loveth the Lord, and His Apostle, even as he is beloved of them; he shall gain the victory. Next morning the flag was placed in Ali's hands, and troops advanced. At this moment, a soldier stepped forth from the Jewish line, and challenged his adversaries to single combat: "I am Merhab," he cried, "as all Khyber knows, a warrior bristling with arms, when the war fiercely burns." Then Ali advanced saying: "I am he whom my mother named the Lion; like a lion of the howling wilderness. I weigh my foes in a giant's balance."

The combatants closed, and Ali cleft the head of Merhab in two. The Moslem line now made a general advance, and, after a sharp conflict, drove back the enemy. In this battle, Ali performed great feats of

prowess. Having lost his shield, he seized the lintel of a door, which he wielded effectually in its stead. Tradition, in its expansive process, has transformed this extemporized shield into a gigantic beam, and magnified the hero into a second Samson. The victory was decisive, for the Jews lost 93 men; while of the Moslems only 19 were killed throughout the whole campaign. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

R.V.C. Bodley

He (Mohammed) began the campaign (of Khyber) by reducing individually the minor strongholds. When this was done, he marched against Al-Kamus, the main fortress of Khaibar. It was a formidable looking place with frowning walls built out of the living rock. All accesses were strongly fortified, and within the ramparts was a well-equipped and well-provisioned garrison.

Siege warfare was unfamiliar to these nomads accustomed to desert raiding. However, Mohammed had a number of improvised siege engines put together on the spot. The most effective of these were palm-trunk battering rams which, eventually, made a small breach in the walls.

Into this Abu Bakr led a heroic attack, but he was driven back. Then Omar tried, but while he reached the mouth of the breach, he had to retire, losing most of his men. Finally, Ali went up against the wall, bearing the black standard. As he charged, he chanted: "I am Ali the Lion; and like a lion howling in the wilderness, I weigh my foes in the giant's balance."

Ali was no giant, but he made up for his lack of height by his great breadth and prodigious strength. Today he was formidable in a scarlet tunic over which he wore his shining breastplate and backplate. On his head gleamed a spiked helmet encrusted with silver. In his right hand he brandished Mohammed's own scimitar, Dhu'l-Fiqar, which had been entrusted to him with the black banner.

Again and again Jewish veterans rushed at Ali. Again and again they staggered away with limbs or heads severed. Finally, the champion of all the Hebrews, a man called Merhab, who towered above the other warriors, planted himself before Ali. He wore a double cuirass, and round his

helmet was a thick turban held in place by an enormous diamond. He was girt with a golden belt from which swung two swords. He did not use these, however, and killed right and left with a long three-pronged spear. For a moment the battle paused and the combatants rested on their arms to watch the duel

Marhab, like Goliath of Gath, had never been defeated. His size alone frightened opponents before they came close to him. His barbed fork disheartened the most skilled swordsman.

Marhab attacked first, driving at Ali with his trident. For a moment, Ali, unaccustomed to this form of weapon gave ground. Then he steadied himself and fenced with the Hebrew. A feint and a parry sent the spear flying. Before Merhab could draw one of his swords, Ali's scimitar had cloven his head through his helmet and turban so that it fell on either side of his shoulders. The Jews, seeing their champion dead, retreated into the city. Mohammed gave the signal for a general assault. The Moslems surged forward. Ali led the onslaught. He had lost his shield during the duel and, to replace it, had torn a door from its hinges, which he carried before him. (The Messenger – the Life of Mohammed, 1946)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Realizing that this was their last stand in Arabia, the Jews fought desperately. As the days went by, the Prophet sent Abu Bakr with a contingent and a flag to the fortress of Na'im; but he was not able to conquer it despite heavy fighting. The Prophet then sent Umar bin al-Khattab on the following day, but he fared no better than Abu Bakr. On the third day, the Prophet called Ali ibn Abu Talib, and, blessing him, commanded him to storm the fortress. Ali led his forces and fought valiantly. In the engagement, he lost his armor and, shielding himself with a portal he had seized, he continued to fight until the fortress was stormed by his troops. The same portal was used by Ali as a little bridge to enable the Muslim soldiers to enter the houses within the fortress… (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

The Results of the Conquest of Khyber

The conquest of Khyber is a landmark in the history of Islam as it is the beginning of the Islamic State and Empire. The Indian historian, M. Shibli, says in his biography of the Prophet:

Khyber was the first campaign in which non-Muslims were made the subjects of the Islamic State. It was the first time that the principles of government in Islam were defined and applied. Therefore, Khyber is the first successful campaign of Islam.

At Khyber, the nascent Islamic State acquired new subjects and new territories. It was the beginning, not only of the Islamic State but also of its expansion. If the conquest of Khyber is the beginning of the Islamic State, then Ali ibn Abi Talib, its conqueror, is its principal architect.

Before the conquest of Khyber, the Muslims were destitutes or semi-destitutes. Khyber suddenly made them rich. Imam Bukhari has quoted Abdullah bin Umar bin al-Khattab as saying: "We were hungry at all times until the conquest of Khyber." And the same authority has quoted Ayesha, the wife of the Prophet, as saying: "It was not until the conquest of Khyber that I could eat dates to my heart's content."

The Muhajireen in Medina had no means of making a living and therefore had no steady income. They had barely managed to survive until the conquest of Khyber. Once Khyber was conquered, there was a sudden change in their fortunes.

Montgomery Watt

Until the capture of Khyber the finances of the Islamic community were precarious, and the Emigrants lived partly off the charity or hospitality of the Helpers. (Mohammed, Prophet and Statesman)

Khyber spelled the difference for the Muslim community between abject poverty and material abundance.

S. Margoliouth

When the Muslims came to apportion their spoils they found that the conquest of Khaibar surpassed every other benefit that God had conferred on their Prophet. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, 1931)

The conquest of Khyber conferred unlimited benefits upon the Muslims; some of them were:

1.Immense quantities of gold and silver that the Jews had been accumulating for many generations.

2.The finest arsenals of Arabia containing the newest weapons of the times such as swords, spears, lances, maces, shields, armor, bows and arrows.

3.Vast herds of horses, camels and cattle, and flocks of sheep and goats.

4.Rich arable lands with palm groves.

Sir John Glubb

The people of Khyber, like those of Medina, made their living by agriculture, particularly the date palm. Even today, the tribes have a saying, "To take dates to Khaiber," which means the same as our expression, "To carry coals to Newcastle." Khyber was said to be the richest oasis in the Hijaz. (The Life and Times of Mohammed)

After the surrender of the Jews in Khyber, the Prophet had to make some new arrangements for the administration of the newly-won territories.

S. Margoliouth

Presently Mohammed bethought him of the plan which became a prominent institution of Islam. To kill or banish the industrious inhabitants of Khaibar would not be good policy, since it was not desirable that the Moslems, who would constantly be wanted for active service, should be settled so far from Medina. Moreover, their skill as cultivators would not equal that of the former owners of the soil. So he decided to leave the Jews in occupation on payment of half their produce, estimated by Abdullah son of Rawahah at 200,000 wasks of dates. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, 1931)

One mighty stroke of Ali's sword solved the economic problems of the Muslim community, and put an end to its poverty forever. He also put an end to the dependence of the Muslims upon a fickle and temperamental nature, to feed them, once he delivered the fertile lands of Khyber to them.

There is yet another sense in which the campaign of Khyber was of immense importance not only to the Muslims of the time of the Prophet but also to the generations of the future. It was a departure, for the first time, from the classical tradition of Arabian warfare. The Arab mode of fighting was often chivalrous but most often inefficient. The Arabs knew less than nothing about strategy, and all that they knew about tactics was hit-andrun. They placed their hopes of victory in their ability to catch their victims by surprise. For centuries, they had fought against each other, and had consistently followed the ancient pattern of hit-and-run, with no variation in tactics. We have seen how a trench checked an army of ten thousand warriors, and immobilized it at the siege of Medina in A.D. 627. The greatest captains of the idolaters like Khalid bin Walid and Ikrama bin Abu Jahl were baffled by the moat, and became helpless before it.

All this was to change after Khyber. Ali ibn Abi Talib taught the Muslims the art of laying siege to, and of capturing fortified positions. He taught them how to map out the strategy of a campaign, and how to fight pitched and decisive battles like disciplined armies. At Khyber, Ali placed the key to the conquest of the whole world in the hands of the Muslims.

The Estate of Fadak

Fadak was another Jewish settlement near Khyber. The people of Fadak voluntarily sent their representatives to the Prophet offering to negotiate the terms of surrender. He accepted their offer of surrender, and gave them the right to stay on their lands as subjects of the Islamic State. Fadak was acquired in this manner without any effort on the part of the army of the Muslims. It was, therefore, considered to be the private property of the Prophet.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

The wealth of Khaybar was to be distributed among the members of the Muslim armed forces according to rule because they had fought to secure it. The wealth of Fadak, on the other hand, fell to Muhammad, as no Muslims and no fighting were involved in its acquisition. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

In the early days of the history of Islam, the Muslims, when they were still in Makkah, were very poor, and had no means of making a living. Khadija, the wife of the Prophet, fed and housed most of them. She spent all her wealth on them so that when she died, there was nothing that she could leave for her daughter, Fatima Zahra. Now when the estate of Fadak was acquired by the Prophet, he decided to make it a gift to his daughter as a recompense for the great sacrifices her mother had made for Islam. He, therefore, gave the estate of Fadak to his daughter, and it became her property.

The Jews of Wadi-ul-Qura and Tayma, other oases in Hijaz, also agreed to surrender to the Prophet on the same terms as those of Khyber and Fadak, and stayed on their lands.

Jaafer ibn Abi Talib

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, was still in Khyber when his cousin, Jaafer ibn Abi Talib, returned from Abyssinia after an absence of nearly fourteen years. When Jaafer learned in Medina that his master was in Khyber, he at once headed there. By a coincidence, his arrival in Khyber, synchronized with the capture of the fortress of Al-Qamus by his brother, Ali. Muhammad loved Jaafer as his own son. He threw his arms around him and said: "I do not know what makes me more happy; the conquest of Khyber or the return of Jaafer."

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Muhammad was so pleased to be reunited with Ja'far that he said he could not tell which was the greater: victory over Khaybar or reunion with Ja'far. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

The Umra or the Lesser Pilgrimage – A.D. 629 (8 A.H.)

One year after the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, visited Makkah to perform the pilgrimage. He was accompanied

by two thousand Muslims. As per the terms of the Treaty, the polytheists vacated Makkah for three days. The Muslims entered the city from the north, and hardly saw any Makkan. The Messenger of God rode his she-camel, al-Qaswa. His friend, Abdullah ibn Rawaha, held her reins as he entered the precincts of the Kaaba. He was reading the verses of the chapter called, Victory, from the Qur'an. Other Muslims were chanting "At Thy command, O Lord! At Thy command, O Lord!"

When all Muslims had assembled in the concourse of the Kaaba, Bilal went on top of the building and called Adhan (the Muslim call to prayer) – the first one in the House of Allah, and two thousand believers responded to his call.

The polytheists were witnessing the scene from the heights of the hills surrounding the valley of Makkah. They had never seen such discipline before, when high-born Muslims were tamely obeying the call of a former slave nor they had seen such a demonstration of equality and unity. The vast mass of the Muslims moved as one body, and the Quraysh could see with their own eyes that it was a body in which there were no distinctions between rich and poor, high and low, black and white, and Arab and non-Arab. The Quraysh could also see that the brotherhood, equality and unity of men which Islam fostered, were not theoretical concepts but were very real. It was a most impressive sight and could not have failed to touch the hearts of even the most hard-bitten idolaters.

The deportment of the Muslims was exemplary. They were most anxious not to do anything that was forbidden, and they were most eager to do only one thing – to obey the commandments of Allah.

And yet this demonstration in the Kaaba of discipline by the Muslims, was so unrehearsed, so spontaneous. To nothing in this world was the Arab more allergic than to discipline; but he was transformed, within a few years, by the magic of Islam. The "touch" of Islam had made him a model of discipline among the nations of the earth.

M. Shibli, the Indian historian, writes in his Sira-tunNabi (Life of the Prophet), Volume I, page 504, 11th printing (1976), published by the Maarif Printing Press, Azamgarh, U.P., India, that at the end of three days, the leaders of Quraysh called on Ali ibn Abi Talib, and said to him:

"Please inform Muhammad that the stipulated time has passed and he and his followers should, therefore, leave Makkah." Ali gave the message to the Prophet. The latter immediately complied, and ordered the Muslims to vacate Makkah whereupon they left Makkah and began their long march toward home.

The Muslims had performed the Umra, and then they returned to their homes in Medina. It was at this time that Khalid bin al-Walid and Amr bin Aas decided to accept Islam. They went to Medina, accepted Islam and joined the ranks of the Muhajireen. They were both destined to become famous in later days as the generals of Abu Bakr and Umar bin al-Khattab respectively.

Letters of the Prophet to the Rulers of Neighboring Countries
In August 629, Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, addressed letters to the rulers of the neighboring countries inviting them to Islam.

E. Von Grunebaum

In 629, Mohammed sent letters to six rulers - the Persian king, the Byzantine emperor, the Negus of Abyssinia, the governor of Egypt, a Ghassanid prince, and a chief of the Banu Hanifa in south-east Arabia, inviting them to Islam. (Classical Islam - A History 600-1258)

Muhammad was God's Messenger not only for the Arabs but for the whole world. It was his duty to deliver God's last message to all mankind, and he did. Professor Margoliouth, however, considers these letters a prelude to aggression and conquest. He says:

About the time of the campaign of Khaibar, he (Mohammed) published his program of world-conquest by sending letters to the rulers of whose fame he had heard. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, 1931)

It is true that the program of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, was one of "world-conquest," but not by force of arms. His aim was to conquer the minds and the hearts of men and women, which Islam did in his day, and is still doing today.

In sending these letters, the Prophet was prompted by his desire that all men should live in obedience to the commandments and laws of God.

Obedience to those commandments and laws alone can guarantee the peace, happiness and welfare of mankind in this world, and its salvation in the Hereafter.

Chapter 30

The Battle of Mootah

IN 629 THE CHRISTIAN ARAB TRIBE OF GHASSAN was ruled by Shorhail, a prince who was a vassal of the Byzantine emperor. He was one of those rulers who had received letters from Muhammad Mustafa inviting them to accept Islam. In those days he held court in Mootah, a town east of the Dead Sea. When the Prophet's emissary, Harith bin Umayr, arrived at his court bearing the letter for him, he ordered his execution.

The murder of Harith bin Umayr was an unprovoked outrage, and the killing of an ambassador is considered an unpardonable crime in many nations. The Prophet decided to take punitive action. He equipped an army of 3000 men, and sent it under the command of his friend and freedman, Zayd bin Haritha, to Mootah, to demand reparations. At the same time, he designated a chain of command and responsibility. In the event of Zayd's death, the command of the army was to pass on to Jaafer ibn Abi Talib. If he too were to be killed, then the third general was to be Abdullah ibn Rawaha.

When Shorhail heard that an army was approaching his capital from Medina, he also mobilized his men, and was soon ready to meet it. He deployed his troops on the south-side, out of the walls of Mootah. They were composed of the Roman garrison of Mootah, and the freshly raised tribal levies. When the Muslims arrived and took stock of the situation, they realized that it was going to be an unequal fight as they were heavily outnumbered by the enemy.

The Muslim leaders held a war council. Zayd bin Haritha proposed that they immediately send a messenger to the Prophet apprising him of the imbalance in the strength of the two forces, and requesting him to

send reinforcements. But Abdullah bin Rawaha opposed him, and said that the decision to fight or not to fight did not rest upon their numbers, and if they were outnumbered by the enemy, it was immaterial for them. "We fight to win the crown of martyrdom, and not the laurels of victory, and here is our chance; let us not miss it," he said. Abdullah bin Rawaha clinched the debate with his powerful argument, and the Muslims advanced to meet the enemy. At the very first clash of arms, Zayd bin Haritha, the first general of the Muslims, was killed.

Betty Kelen

Zayd took the Apostle's standard and was killed almost at once, the first Muslim to die for the faith on foreign soil. (Mohammed, Messenger of God)

The command of the army then passed to Jaafer ibn Abi Talib, the elder brother of Ali. He fought most gallantly and for a long time, killing so many of the enemy that their bodies were stacked like cordwood all around him. But then a Roman soldier crept up from behind, unseen, and struck a blow with his sword at his right arm, and severed it. Jaafer didn't let the banner fall, and kept pressing the enemy. A little later, another Roman came from behind, and with a blow of his sword, cut his left arm also. The hero, still undismayed, held the banner under his chin, and kept advancing. But with both arms gone, he was unable to defend himself, and in a few moments, a third Roman approached him, and killed him with a blow of his mace on his head. After Jaafer's death, Abdullah bin Rawaha took charge of the army, and he too fell fighting against heavy odds.

Washington Irving

Among the different missions which Mohammed had sent beyond the bounds of Arabia to invite neighboring princes to accept Islam, was one to the governor of Bosra, the great mart on the confines of Syria. His envoy was killed at Mootah by an Arab of the Christian tribe of Ghassan, and son to Shorhail, an emir, who governed Mootah in the name of Heraclius.

Mohammed sent an army of 3000 against the offending city. It was a momentous expedition, as it might, for the first time, bring the arms of

Islam in collision with those of the Roman Empire. The command was entrusted to Zaid, his freedman. Several chosen officers were associated with him. One was Mohammed's cousin, Jaafer, the same who, by his eloquence, had vindicated the doctrines of Islam before the king of Abyssinia, and defeated the Koreishite embassy. He was now in the prime of life, and noted for great courage and manly beauty. (The Life of Mohammed)

As Jaafer charged the enemy, he sang a song. Sir William Muir has given the following translation of his song:

Paradise! O Paradise! How fair a resting place!
Cold is the water there, and sweet the shade.
Rome, Rome! Thine hour of tribulation draweth nigh.
When I close with her, I will hurl her to the ground.

When Jaafer was killed, his body was brought into the camp. Abdullah bin Umar bin al-Khattab, who was with the army, says that he counted the wounds on the hero's body, and found more than fifty of them, and they were all in front. Jaafer had dared sword and spear even after the loss of his arms, but had not flinched.

When all three generals appointed by the Prophet had been killed, the Muslims were left leaderless for a time. Then Khalid bin al-Walid who was also fighting in the ranks, seized the banner, and managed to rally the Muslims. At night the armies disengaged, and this gave him the opportunity to reorganize his men. He is said to have fought a defensive action on the following day but realizing that it was impossible to win a victory, ordered a retreat from Mootah, and succeeded in bringing the remnants of the army back to Medina.

When these warriors entered Medina, they got a "reception" that must have made them forget the "reception" that the Romans gave them in Mootah. They were greeted by jeering crowds which cast dust in their faces and garbage on their heads, and taunted them for fleeing from the enemy instead of dying like men if not like heroes. Eventually, the Prophet himself was compelled to intervene on their behalf to rescue them from indignity and molestation.

Sir William Muir

The ranks of the Muslims were already broken; and the Romans in full pursuit made great havoc among the fugitives. So, distinctly, in the secretary of Wackidi. Some accounts pretend that Khalid rallied the army, and either turned the day against the Romans, or made it a drawn battle. But besides that the brevity of all the accounts is proof enough of a reverse, the reception of the army on its return to Medina, admits of only one conclusion, viz. a complete, ignominious, and unretrieved discomfiture. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1861)

Sir John Glubb

In the battle of Mootah, Jaafer ibn Abu Talib, the brother of Ali, seized the banner from the dying Zaid and raised it aloft once more. The enemy closed in on the heroic Jaafer, who was soon covered with wounds. Tradition relates that when both his hands were cut off gripping the banner, he still stood firm, holding the staff between his two stumps, until a Byzantine soldier struck him a mortal blow.

When the defeated Muslims approached Medina, the Prophet and the people of the town went out to meet them. The citizens began to throw dirt at the crestfallen warriors, crying, "You runaways, you fled from the way of God!" But Mohammed, with that kind paternalism which he knew well how to use, interposed on their behalf.

Next morning in the mosque, the Prophet announced that he had, in a vision, seen the martyrs of Mootah in Paradise, reclining upon couches, but Jaafer was there in the guise of an angel with two wings, stained on their feathers with the blood of martyrdom. It was as a result of this vision that the martyr has since been known as Jaafer the Flyer, Jaafer at-Tayyar. (The Great Arab Conquests)

Betty Kelen

When the army came riding home, he (Mohammed) went out to meet them, Jafer's son on the saddle before him. It was a terrible homecoming for these men who had returned from battle alive, following Khalid, while the Prophet's own relatives and beloved companions had fallen. The people of Medina picked up sand and dirt along the way to throw at

the returning force, shouting, "Cowards! Runaways! You fled from God." (Muhammad, the Messenger of God)

Some Muslim historians have made desperate efforts to "prove" that Mootah was a Muslim victory which it was not. It is not clear why a defeat is being dished out by them as a victory. The attempt to prove that Muslims won the battle, may have been prompted by their desire to present the Muslim soldiers as invincible. But will they smother truth merely to prove that Muslims were invincible. After all, the Muslims were defeated in the battle of Uhud!

Abul Kalam Azad, the Indian biographer of the Prophet, says that the Muslims inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Romans at Mootah. He takes notice of the reception that the citizens of Medina gave to the "victors" when they came home, but he attributes it to their "ignorance," and says that they had received wrong reports of the outcome of the battle.

But if the citizens had received wrong reports, then it is curious that no one among the warriors tried to correct them. No one among them, for example, said to the citizens: "Is this your way of welcoming the heroes of Islam, with dirt and garbage? Do you reward the defenders of the Faith by booing them and insulting them?" But they did not pose any such questions.

Even if the citizens of Medina had been misinformed that the Muslims were defeated at Mootah, as Azad claims, then how long it ought to take them to learn the truth? In the first place, the soldiers themselves did not protest when the citizens covered them with garbage, as already noted. In the second place, some among them were too embarrassed to go out of their homes. They did not want to be seen in public for fear of being upbraided or even rough-handled by the citizens for the abject cowardice they had shown before the enemy. Their greatest desire was to hide themselves from everyone else.

D. S. Margoliouth

The survivors of this disastrous fight (Mootah) were greeted by the Moslems as deserters, and some were even afraid to appear in public for

some time. Such Spartans had the people of Medina become in their eight years of warfare. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, 1931)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

As soon as Khalid and the army reached Medinah, Muhammad and the Muslims went out to meet them, Muhammad carrying on his arm, Abdullah, the son of Ja'far, the second commander of the Muslim force. Upon learning the news, the people flung dust in the face of the Muslim soldiers and accused them of fleeing in the face of the enemy and abandoning the cause of God. The Prophet of God argued with his people that the soldiers did not flee but simply withdrew in order, with God's will, to advance again. Despite this justification on the part of Muhammad of the Muslim army, the people were not willing to forgive them their withdrawal and return. Salamah ibn Hisham, a member of this expedition, would neither go to the mosque for prayer nor show himself in public in order to avoid being chastised for fleeing from the cause of God. Were it not for the fact that these same men, especially Khalid ibn al-Walid, later distinguished themselves in battle against the same enemy, their reputations would have remained forever stained. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Another "proof" that Abul Kalam Azad has found of the "victory" of the Muslims at Mootah, is that the Romans did not pursue them. He says that if the Romans had won the battle of Mootah, they would have pursued the Muslims to the gates of Medina itself, and beyond.

But the Romans might have had other reasons for not pursuing the Muslims. One of them was that with their cavalry, they could not maneuver in the desert. The desert to them was like the sea, and neither they nor the Persians had any "ships" in which to "navigate" in it. The best they could do, was to operate on the "shores" as "land-powers" which they, in fact, were, and at a decided disadvantage strategically and tactically against a "maritime" nation like the Arabs

If the Arabs retreated into the desert before an active foe, their safety was assured. He was simply not equipped to penetrate the desert. The logistical problems alone of attacking them in their own element discouraged the most enterprising spirits of those days. The desert was the

"fortress" which protected the Arabs from the ambitions of all the conquerors of the past, and guaranteed their freedom and independence.

Sir John Glubb

The key to all the early operations, against Persia and against Syria alike, is that the Persians and Byzantines could not move in the desert, being mounted on horses. The Muslims were like a sea-power, cruising offshore in their ships, whereas the Persians and Byzantines alike could only take up positions on the shore (that is, the cultivated area) unable to launch out to "sea" and engage the enemy in his own desert element. Similarly the Arabs, like the Norse or Danish pirates who raided England, were at first afraid to move inland far from their "ships." Raiding the areas on the "shores" of the desert, they hastened back to their own element when danger threatened. (The Great Arab Conquests, 1963)

Joel Carmichael

There is a remarkable resemblance between the strategy of the Bedouin and that of the modern sea power. Viewed from the vantage point of nomads, the desert, which only they could make use of, was like a vast ocean on which they controlled the only vessels. The Bedouin could use it for supplies and communications - and as a haven when defeated. They could appear from its depths whenever they wished and slip back again at will. This gave them enormous mobility and resilience, as long as they were moving against sedentary communities (Shaping of the Arabs, 1967)

The battle was fought just outside Mootah. If the Arabs had defeated the Romans and had routed them, then what did they do with the city which lay at their feet? As conquerors they ought to have occupied it. But no historian has claimed that the Muslims entered Mootah and occupied it.

The Arabs were notorious for their love of booty. This is a fact well-known to every student of their history, and historians like Abul Kalam Azad cannot be ignorant of it. The same historian says that the number of the Romans and their allies who fought at Mootah was two hundred thousand. If the Muslims had defeated the Romans, then they ought to have captured thousands of Romans, and they ought to have returned to

Medina laden with plunder and the treasures of Mootah. But they did not. The annals are silent on this point. There is no reference to any booty or to any prisoners of war in the accounts of the battle of Mootah. This silence is the most eloquent proof that the Muslims were not the victors. Actually, they considered themselves lucky to have escaped alive from the battlefield.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

After the campaign of Mootah, the Muslim army led by Khalid ibn al Walid returned to Medinah neither victorious nor vanquished, but happy to be able to return at all. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

We admire those Muslims who were aware that they had shown cowardice in the battle of Mootah, and were ashamed of it. But there were other Muslims, some of them companions of the Prophet, who fled from battle, not once, but several times, and they were not ashamed of their performance. One may admire them for their brazenness though. To save their own dear lives, they could flee from a battlefield, and then return to it when the scales tilted in favor of the Muslims.

The battle of Mootah was a defeat for the Muslims. As for the Romans, it was nothing more than a minor border skirmish. They drove the Arabs back into the desert, and for them the incident was closed.

Chapter 31

The Campaign of Dhat es-Salasil

The battle of Mootah was fought in September 629. In the following month, the Prophet received reports that the tribesmen of Qadha'a were massing in the north of Wadi-ul-Qura with the intent of raiding Medina. This was a direct result of the defeat of the Muslims at Mootah. The pagan tribes believed that the power of the Muslim was broken at Mootah, and that if they attacked Medina, they would hardly meet any resistance.

The Prophet had to take counter-measures to forestall a tribal excursion into Medina. He, therefore, sent three hundred soldiers under the command of Amr bin Aas, to watch the Qadha'a in their own territory, and to disperse them, if necessary.

Amr left Medina, and halted in the north of Wadi-ul-Qura, near a spring called Dhat es-Salasil. He was alarmed to see multitudes of armed tribesmen roving in the valley and sent a messenger to the Prophet requesting reinforcements. The Prophet immediately complied, and sent another two hundred men under the command of Abu Obaidah ibn al-Jarrah.This second group included both Abu Bakr and Umar.

When Abu Obaidah arrived in the camp of Amr bin Aas, he indicated that he would like to take command of both contingents. But Amr's answer to this suggestion was an emphatic no. He made it clear to Abu Obaidah that he (Amr) was the supreme commander of all the troops, his own as well as the reinforcements which the latter had brought, all five hundred men.

At night there was a sudden drop in the temperature, and the weather became unseasonably cold. The troopers lighted small fires for warmth, and sat around them. Amr, however, ordered them to put them out. All

of them obeyed except Abu Bakr and Umar. Amr repeated his order. But they still demurred whereupon Amr threatened to throw both of them into it if they persisted in disobeying him. Umar turned to Abu Bakr and complained to him about the brusque and abrupt manner of Amr.Abu Bakr told him that Amr understood the art of war better than they did, and therefore they ought to obey him. They then extinguished the fire.

On the following day there was some desultory fighting but the tribesmen fought without any order or discipline and were soon dispersed. The Muslims wanted to pursue them into the hills and valleys but Amr forbade them to do so. The tribesmen had abandoned their baggage and the Muslims collected it. They also captured many camels and sheep, and then returned to Medina.

During the campaign, and on the return journey, Amr bin Aas led his troops in prayers. He thus demonstrated to them that he was their commander in both spheres – military and religious. Abu Obaidah, Abu Bakr and Umar, all three, took their orders from him, and said their prayers behind him.

When the expedition returned to Medina, Umar complained to the Prophet about the unceremonious and highhanded manner in which his commanding officer, Amr bin Aas, had treated him and Abu Bakr at Dhat es-Salasil. It was a custom of the Prophet to debrief his captains when they returned from an expedition. They had to give him a comprehensive report on the conduct of the campaign.

Amr was ready to defend his actions. He told the Prophet that the Muslims were very few, and the bonfires would have betrayed their lack of numbers to the enemy. It was in the interests of their own security, he said, that he had ordered them to extinguish them. He further said that the reason why he forbade his men to pursue the enemy was that the latter was in his own territory, and could have easily regrouped to attack them. The Muslims, he pointed out, were fighting in unfamiliar country, and were, therefore, at a disadvantage. The Prophet was satisfied with Amr's explanation, and dismissed Umar's complaints.

Sir William Muir

The repulse of his army from Mootah affected dangerously the prestige of Mohammed among the tribes of the Syrian frontier. There were rumors that the Bedouin tribes of that neighborhood had assembled in great force, and were even threatening a descent upon Medina. Amru, the new convert, was therefore placed at the head of three hundred men including thirty horse, with instructions to subjugate the hostile tribes and incite those whom he found friendly, to harass the Syrian border.

After a march of ten days he encamped at a spring near the Syrian confines. There he found that the enemy was assembled in great numbers, and that he could look for little aid from the local tribes. He halted and dispatched a messenger for reinforcements. Mohammed at once complied, and sent two hundred men, among whom were both Abu Bakr and Omar, under the command of Abu Obeidah. On joining Amr, Abu Obeidah wished to assume the leadership of the whole force, or at the least to retain the chief authority over his own detachment; but Amru, giving promise of the decision and firmness which characterized him in after days, insisted on retaining the sole command. Abu Obeidah, a man of mild and pliant temper, succumbed. "If you refusest to acknowledge my authority," he said, "I have no resource but to obey thee; for the Prophet strictly charged me to suffer no altercation, nor any division of command." Amru replied imperiously: "I am the chief over thee. Thou has only brought a reinforcement to my army." "Be it so," said Abu Obeidah. Amru then assumed command of the united troops, and led their prayers; for thus early were the spiritual functions in Islam blended with the political and military. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

A few weeks after the return of Khalid, Muhammad sought to make up the losses in Muslim prestige in the northern parts of the peninsula which the previous engagement with the Byzantines had caused. He, therefore, commissioned Amr ibn al-Aas to rouse the Arabs to march against al-Sham. He chose Amr for this task because the latter's mother belonged to one of the northern tribes, and he hoped that Amr could use this connection to facilitate his mission. As he arrived at a well called al-Salassil, in the land of Judham, fearing the enemy might overtake him, he sent word to the Prophet asking for more forces. The Prophet sent

Abu Ubaydah ibn al Jarrah at the head of a corps of Muhajirun which included Abu Bakr and Umar… (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Amr bin Aas was a new Muslim. But once he became a Muslim, he rose very rapidly from ranker to general in the army of Medina. He was, it is obvious, endowed with extraordinary ability both as a general and an administrator. The Prophet, therefore, placed men who were many years older than him, and who had accepted Islam long before him, under his command.

Abu Obaidah and Abu Bakr had become Muslim twenty years before Amr, and thus represented the "brass" in Islam whereas Amr bin Aas was only a "rookie" in faith at this time. And yet the Prophet ordered Abu Obaidah to serve under Amr.

This only proves that when the time came for the Prophet to select a man to take command in a certain situation, he took into account, not his age, but his ability – the ability to get results!

Chapter 32

The Conquest of Makkah

The Quraysh had been unable to exploit their own victory over the Muslims at the battle of Uhud, but when the latter were defeated at the battle of Mootah by the Christians, they were tempted to exploit the Christian victory, and to restore the pre-Hudaybiyya conditions in Arabia. The Muslim defeat at Mootah played a key role in the events preceding the fall of Makkah in 630.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

We may recall that as soon as Khalid and the army returned to Medinah without the proofs of victory (at the battle of Mootah), they were called deserters. Many soldiers and commanders felt so humiliated that they stayed at home in order not to be seen and insulted in public. The campaign of Mootah gave the Quraysh the impression that the Muslims and their power had now been destroyed and that both their dignity and the fear which they previously inspired in others had all but disappeared. This made the Quraysh incline strongly to the conditions prevalent before the Treaty of Hudaybiyya. They thought that they could now launch a war against which the Muslims were incapable of defending themselves, not to speak of counterattacking or making retaliation. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

According to the terms of the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, the Arab tribes were free to enter into treaty relations with either the Muslims or the Quraysh. Taking advantage of this stipulation, the tribe of Banu Khoza'a wrote a treaty of friendship with the Prophet of Islam, and another tribe – Banu Bakr – became an ally of the Quraysh. Hostility had existed between these two tribes since pre-Islamic times but now both had to

abide by the terms of the Treaty of Hudaybiyya, and to refrain from attacking each other

But eighteen months after the Treaty of Hudaybiyya had been signed, a band of the warriors of Banu Bakr suddenly attacked Banu Khoza'a in their homes at night. The time of this attack is given as late Rajab of 8 A.H. (November 629). The Khoza'a had done nothing to provoke this attack. They took refuge in the precincts of the Kaaba but their enemies pursued them even there, and killed a number of them. Others saved their lives by seeking the protection of Budail bin Waraqa and his friend, Rafa'a, in their houses, in Makkah.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

The Treaty of Hudaybiyya prescribed that any nonMakkans wishing to join the camp of Muhammad or that of the Quraysh may do so without obstruction. On the basis of this provision, the tribe of Khuza'ah joined the ranks of Muhammad, and that of Banu Bakr joined the Quraysh. Between Khuzaah and Banu Bakr a number of old unsettled disputes had to be suspended on account of the new arrangement. With the Quraysh now believing (after the battle of Mootah) that Muslim power had crumbled, Banu al Dil, a clan of Banu Bakr, thought that the occasion had come to avenge themselves against Khuzaah. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Banu Bakr could not have attacked Khozaa without the connivance and encouragement if not the open support of the Quraysh. Tabari, the historian, says that Ikrima bin Abu Jahl, Safwan bin Umayya and Suhayl bin Amr, all leading figures of Quraysh, disguised themselves and fought at the side of Banu Bakr against the Khozaa. Of these three, the last named was the chief signatory of the Quraysh to the Treaty of Hudaybiyya.

Maxime Rodinson

In Rajab of the year 8 (November 629), in consequence of a vendetta which had been going for several decades, some of the more excited of the Qurayshites at their rear, attacked a group of the tribe of Khuza'a, Mohammed's allies, not far from Mecca. One man was killed and the rest badly mauled and forced to flee into the sacred territory of Mecca.

Pursued even there they took refuge in two friendly houses. Shamefully the Banu Bakr laid siege to the houses. In all twenty people of the Khuza'a were slain. (Mohammed, translated by Anne Carter)

One of the chiefs of Khozaa, Amr bin Salim, went to Medina and appealed to the Prophet for his intervention. The Prophet was shocked to hear the story of the outrage. As an ally of the Khozaa, he had to defend them from their enemies. But before considering military action, he made an attempt to employ peaceful means to obtain redress and justice. He sent a messenger to the Quraysh, and suggested that:

*The clients of Quraysh, i.e., Banu Bakr, or Quraysh themselves pay blood-wit to the Banu Khozaa, or;

*Quraysh should waive their protection of Banu Bakr, or;

*They should declare the Treaty of Hudaybiyya to be void.

Zarqani says that the man who answered for the Quraysh was Qurtaba bin Umar. He said to the envoy of the Prophet that only the last of the three terms was acceptable to them. In other words, the Quraysh told him that the Treaty of Hudaybiyya with its stipulation of a ten-year truce, was already a "dead letter" as far as they were concerned.

The hotheads of the Quraysh had been quick to repudiate the Treaty of Hudaybiyya but very soon their more realistic and discreet leaders realized that the answer they had sent to Medina was a blunder as it had been dictated, not by prudence and sagacity, but by presumption and arrogance. And when they thought of what the consequences of their action could be, they decided to act immediately to avert disaster. But how? After an animated discussion, they agreed that Abu Sufyan should go to Medina, and should try to persuade the Prophet to renew the Treaty of Hudaybiyya.

When Abu Sufyan arrived in Medina, he first went to see his daughter, Umm Habiba – one of the wives of the Prophet. As he was going to sit on a rug, she pulled it from under him, and said: "You are an unclean idolater, and I cannot allow you to sit on the rug of the Messenger of God." She treated him as if he was an untouchable pariah. Shaken by such a reception, he left her, and went to the mosque hoping to see the Prophet himself. But the latter did not give him audience. He then solicited the aid of Abu Bakr, Umar and Ali but all of them told him that they could

not intercede for him with the Prophet, and he returned to Makkah empty-handed.

The Quraysh had broken the pledge, and the envoys of Khozaa were still in Medina, demanding justice. If the Prophet had condoned the crime of the Quraysh, he would have seriously compromised his own position in the sight of all Arabs. He could not allow this to happen. Eventually, the Prophet decided to capture Makkah, and he ordered the Muslims to mobilize.

The army of Islam left Medina on the tenth of Ramadan of 8 A.H. (February 1, 630). The news that an army was marching southwards, spread rapidly in the desert, and even reached Makkah itself. Those members of the clan of Banu Hashim who were still in Makkah, decided, upon hearing this news, to leave the city and to meet the advancing army. Among them were Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib, the uncle of the Prophet; Aqeel bin Abi Talib, and Abu Sufyan bin al-Harith bin Abdul Muttalib, his cousins. They joined the army of Islam, and reentered Makkah with it.

In the afternoon of the 19th of Ramadan, the army arrived in Merr ad-Dharan in the north of Makkah, and halted there to spend the night. At night the Prophet ordered his soldiers to light little fires, and the whole plain lit up with thousands of bonfires.

Abu Sufyan and Hakim bin Hizam had also left Makkah to investigate the reports of the invasion by the Muslims. Riding north on the road to Medina, they also arrived in Merr ad-Dharan, and were dumb-founded to see countless little fires burning in the valley. When they realized they were in the camp of the Muslims, they were greatly troubled not knowing what they could do to save themselves or their city.

Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib also had great anxiety for the safety of the Makkans. He feared that if they offered resistance, they would be massacred. He was riding the white mule of the Prophet through the camp, when at its southern perimeter, he suddenly ran into Abu Sufyan and Hakim bin Hizam. He told them that they could see the numbers of the Muslims, and that the Quraysh had no power to resist them. Abu Sufyan asked him what he ought to do. Abbas told him to ride behind him on his mule, and that he would take him to the Prophet, and would try to

get safe-conduct for him. Hakim bin Hizam returned to Makkah to report on what he had seen and heard. Abbas and Abu Sufyan rode through the Muslim camp Presently, they rode past the tent of Umar, and he wanted to know who were the two visitors.

When Umar recognized Abu Sufyan, he was thrilled, and said to him: "O enemy of God, at last you are in my power, and now I am going to kill you." But Abbas told him that he (Abu Sufyan) was under his protection. Thereupon Umar rushed to see the Prophet and solicited his permission to kill him. But the Prophet just told Abbas to bring him on the following morning.

Early next morning, Abbas, Abu Sufyan and Umar, all three appeared before the tent of the Prophet. Umar was raring to kill Abu Sufyan but the Prophet restrained him, and invited the latter to accept Islam. Abu Sufyan was not very eager to accept Islam but Abbas told him that if he didn't, then Umar would kill him, and he would never return to Makkah. Faced by the specter of death, Abu Sufyan declared the Shahadah which formally admitted him to the community of the Muslims.

Abbas also requested the Prophet to grant Abu Sufyan some favor which he would equate with a "distinction." The Prophet said that all those Makkans who would enter Abu Sufyan's house, or would stay in their own houses, or would enter the precincts of the Kaaba, would be safe from all harm. Abu Sufyan was very proud that the Prophet had declared his house to be a sanctuary for the idolaters of Makkah. His latter-day friends and admirers are flaunting his "distinction" right to this day.

It was Friday, Ramadan 20, 8 A.H. (February 11, 630) when the army of Islam broke camp at Merr ad-Dharan, and marched toward Makkah. Abbas and Abu Sufyan stood on the brow of an eminence to watch the squadrons march past them. The latter was much impressed by the order, the discipline, the numbers and the espirit de corps of the formations, and said to Abbas:

"Your nephew has truly won a great kingdom and great power." Abbas snapped: "Woe to you! This is prophethood and not a kingdom." Abu Sufyan had never seen such an awesome sight before, and with his pagan reflexes, and extremely limited vision, could interpret it only in

terms of material power. But he realized that the game for him and the idolaters was over at last, and the only important thing now was to save his and their lives.

Sufyan rushed back to Makkah, and entering the precincts of the Kaaba, called out aloud: "O Makkans! Muhammad has arrived with his army, and you have no power to oppose him. Those of you who enter my house, would be safe from harm, and now only your unconditional surrender can save you from massacre."

Abu Sufyan's wife, Hinda, heard his call. She flew into a most violent rage, stormed out of her house, seized him by his beard, and screamed: "O Makkans! Kill this unlucky idiot. He is in dotage. Get rid of him and defend your city from your enemy."

But who would defend Makkah and how? Presently, Abu Sufyan was surrounded by other citizens of Makkah, and one of them asked him: "Your house can accommodate only a few people. How can so many people find sanctuary in it?" He said: "All those people who stay in their own houses or enter the precincts of the Kaaba, would also be safe." This ordinance meant that all that the idolaters would have to do to save their lives, would be to stay indoors, and to refrain from challenging the invaders.

Washington Irving

Mohammed prepared a secret expedition to take Mecca by surprise. All roads leading to Mecca were barred to prevent any intelligence of his movements being carried to Mecca. But among the fugitives from Mecca, there was one Hateb, whose family had remained behind, and were without connections or friends to take an interest in their welfare. Hateb now thought to gain favor for them among the Koreish, by betraying the plans of Mohammed. He accordingly, wrote a letter revealing the intended enterprise, and gave it in charge of a singing woman, who undertook to carry it to Mecca. She was already on the road when Mohammed was appraised of the treachery. Ali and five others, well-mounted, were sent in pursuit of the messenger. They soon overtook her, but searched her person in vain. Most of them would have given up the search and turned back but Ali was confident that the Prophet of God could not be mistaken nor misinformed. Drawing his scimitar, he swore to kill the

messenger unless the letter was produced. The threat was effectual. She drew forth the letter from among her hair.

Hateb, on being taxed with his perfidy, acknowledged it; but pleaded anxiety to secure favor for his destitute family, and his certainty that the letter would be harmless, and of no avail against the purposes of the Apostle of God.

Omar spurned at these excuses and would have struck off his head; but Mohammed, calling to mind, that Hateb had fought bravely in support of the faith in the battle of Badr, forgave him.

Mohammed, who knew not what resistance he might meet with, made a careful distribution of his forces as he approached Mecca. While the main body marched directly forward, strong detachments advanced over the hills on each side. To Ali who commanded a large body of cavalry, was confided the sacred banner, which he was to plant on Mount Hadjun, and maintain it there until joined by the Prophet. Express orders were given to all the generals to practice forbearance, and in no instance to make the first attack.

(The Life of Mohammed)

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, entered Makkah from the north. Usama, the son of his friend and the martyr of Mootah, Zayd bin Haritha, was riding pillion with him. Muhammad's head was bowed low, and he was reciting the chapter from Qur’an called "The Victory."

Ali carried the banner of Islam as he rode at the head of the cavalry. The Prophet ordered Zubayr bin al-Awwam to enter the city from the west, and Khalid bin al-Walid from the south. He gave strict orders to his army not to kill anyone except in self-defense. He had long desired to destroy the idols in Kaaba but he wished to do so without any bloodshed. His orders were clear and explicit; nevertheless, Khalid killed 28 Makkans at the southern gate of the city. He said he had met resistance.

Sir John Glubb

The Muslim occupation of Mecca was virtually bloodless. The fiery Khalid bin Waleed killed a few people at the southern gate and was sharply reprimanded by Mohammed for doing so.
(The Great Arab Conquests)

Eight years earlier Muhammad had left Makkah as a fugitive with a price on his head, and now he was entering the same city as its conqueror. His manner, however, bespoke not of pride or even of exultation but of gratitude and humility – gratitude to God for His mercy in bestowing success upon His humble slave, and humility in the contemplation of the vanity of worldly glory, and the evanescence of all things human.

The Prophet rode into the precincts of the Kaaba, dismounted from his camel, called his cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, and both of them entered the Kaaba, cognizant of the Divine Commandment to the Prophets, Abraham (Ibrahim) and Ismael:

… and We covenanted with Abraham and Ismael that they should sanctify My house… (Chapter 2; verse 125)

The Prophet and Ali found the House of God (Kaaba) in a state of defilement; it had become a pantheon of 360 idols, and it had to be sanctified. The Prophet knocked down each idol as he read the following verse from Qur'an:

Truth has come, and Falsehood has vanished. For Falsehood is (by its nature) bound to vanish. (Chapter 17; verse 81)

The largest idol in the pantheon was that of Hubal, the dynastic god of the clan of Banu Umayya. Abu Sufyan had taken it with him on a camel into the battle of Uhud to inspire his warriors with its presence. Hubal was mounted on a high pedestal, and the Prophet could not reach it. He, therefore, ordered Ali to climb on his shoulders, and to knock it down. In obedience to the prophetic command, Ali had to stand on the shoulders of the Prophet; he aimed a blow at the principal deity of the idolaters, and smashed it into pieces. With that tremendous stroke, Ali put an end forever to idolatry in the Kaaba!

Kaaba, the House of God, had been sanctified.

Some idols were on a high pedestal and the Apostle could not reach them. He ordered Ali to climb on his shoulders and to knock them down. Ali mounted the shoulders of the Apostle, and knocked down the idols. He thus removed the impurity of idolatry from the Kaaba for all time. (The Messenger of Mercy, Lahore, Pakistan, 1970)

When all the idols had been destroyed, all images had been effaced, and all vestiges of polytheism had been obliterated, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, ordered Bilal to call out Adhan. Bilal called Adhan and the valley of Makkah rang out with his rich and sonorous takbir. The Prophet then made the seven circuits of the Kaaba, and offered prayer of thanksgiving to his Creator.

In the meantime, the Quraysh had gathered in the court of the Kaaba awaiting the Prophet. They hoped that he would give them audience before giving a verdict on their fate.

Presently the Prophet appeared at the threshold of the Kaaba. He surveyed the crowd in front of him and addressed it as follows:

"There is no god but Allah. He is One and all Alone, and He has no partners. All praise and thanks to Him. He has fulfilled His promise. He has helped His slave to victory, and He has dispersed the gangs of his enemies.

'O people! Listen to me. All the arrogance, the distinctions, the pride, and all the claims of blood of the Times of Ignorance are under my feet today.

'O Quraysh! Allah has destroyed the arrogance of the Times of Ignorance, and He has destroyed the pride of race. All men are the children of Adam, and Adam was a handful of dust."

The Prophet then read the following verse from Qur'an:

O People! We created you from a male and a female and distributed you among tribes and families for the facility of reference only. But in the sight of God only those people have a place of honor who are God-

fearing and God-loving. Verily, God is knowledgeable and understanding. (Chapter 49; verse 13)

This verse is the Magna Carta of the equality and brotherhood of all men in Islam. There cannot be any distinction between men on the grounds of race, color, nationality, family or wealth. But whereas Islam destroys all other distinctions, it upholds a distinction of its own, and that is the distinction of faith and character.

Muhammad then posed a question to the Quraysh: "How do you think, I am going to treat you now?" They said: "You are a generous brother, and the son of a generous brother. We expect only charity and forgiveness from you." He said: "I will tell you what Joseph said to his brothers, 'there is no blame on you today.' (Qur'an. Chapter 12; verse 92). Go now; all of you are my freedmen."

The Prophet declared a general amnesty in Makkah. The amnesty extended even to the apostates. He forbade his army to plunder the city or to seize anything that belonged to the Quraysh. Quraysh had left nothing undone to compass his destruction, and the destruction of Islam; but in his hour of triumph, he condoned all their crimes and transgressions.

The Quraysh, at first, were incredulous. They could not believe their own ears. How could Muhammad resist the temptation to kill them all, after all that they had done to him in more than two decades, and especially now that he had so much power in his hand? The unwillingness of Muhammad to use his power was something that utterly surpassed the comprehension of the polytheists of Makkah. Considerable time passed before the meaning of the intent of Muhammad sank into their minds, and the amnesty began to look possible and real to them.

The aim of Muhammad, the Apostle of Peace, was to capture Makkah without bloodshed, and in this he was successful. It was here that he revealed himself, in the words of Al-Qur'an al-Majid "a mercy for all mankind." History cannot furnish an example of such forbearance. Not only the pagans were not exterminated; not only they did not have to pay any penalty for their crimes of the past; they were not even disturbed in the possession of the houses which the Muhajireen had left in Makkah, and which they had occupied.

From the Kaaba, the Prophet went to Mount Safa, and the people of Makkah came to acknowledge him as their sovereign in his dual character – as Messenger of God, and as their temporal ruler. All men gave the pledge of their loyalty to Muhammad by placing their hands on his hand. Next came the turn of women to take the oath of loyalty. But he did not want to touch the hand of any woman who was not his wife. He, therefore, ordered Umar bin al-Khattab to accept the pledge of women on his behalf.

Sir John Glubb

The Apostle then ordered Umar ibn al-Khattab to accept the oaths of women. The Great Arab Conquests)

When oath-taking was over, the Messenger of God addressed himself to the new political and administrative problems arising out of the conquest of Makkah.

The fascinating, complex story that had begun on February 12, 610, in the cave of Hira, had climaxed on February 11, 630, in the court of Kaaba. It was a day of emotion, promise and ceremony, and a day rich in history, significance, and symbolism. The aspiration that had seemed hopeless in 620 in Ta'if, had become an accomplished fact in 630 in Makkah.

The Quraysh had carried on a long and bitter struggle against Islam for twenty years but many among them now could see that the idols which they worshipped as their gods and goddesses, were utterly useless things. They, therefore, accepted Islam. Among them, there were both kinds of proselytes: a few who had been convinced that Muhammad was the true messenger of God, and they acknowledged him as such. But there were many others who accepted Islam because they had very little to choose from. They realized that it was no use bucking the tide, and they also sensed that it was not such a bad bargain after all to declare themselves Muslims, and they did, with what reservations, was a question to be answered by the future alone.

All members of the clan of Banu Umayya, including Hinda, the wife of Abu Sufyan and the cannibal of Uhud, also "accepted" Islam.

Here one may pause to reflect on the "acceptance" of Islam by the Banu Umayya. A man can surrender to the enemy because of fear, and fear can also seal his mouth. Fear can do many things but there is one thing it cannot do – it cannot change hatred into love. For twenty years, Banu Umayya had spearheaded the pagan opposition to Islam. They waged economic, political, military and psychological war against its Prophet, and against his followers. Now to imagine that one demonstration of military might by Muhammad "convinced" them that he was the true messenger of God, would be too much to expect from human nature. The demonstration of might by the Muslims did not change the hatred, resentment and bitterness of the Banu Umayya into love and sweetness, especially at a time when Islam deprived them not only of the idols they worshipped as their deities but also deprived them of their prestige, privileges, status and power. They had, therefore, the same state of mind that every defeated nation has. Their hearts were full of hatred, rancor and vindictiveness against the guardians of Islam.

The Banu Umayya accepted Islam in the reflexive recoil from the collapse of the whole pagan effort in Makkah. Their efforts to rescue the past, and their struggle to maintain their links to paganism as pagans had failed but perhaps they could try to do the same thing as Muslims. The champions of the idols, therefore, entered the ranks of the believers disguised as Muslims. This made them much more dangerous than before when their opposition to Islam had been overt. At the moment, however, they went "underground" and marked time awaiting an opportunity to surface when they would destroy Islam, if possible; but if not, then they would change its distinguishing characteristics, and would restore as many institutions of the Times of Ignorance as possible.

The Banu Umayya could not subvert Islam in the lifetime of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, because he took effective safeguards against the recrudescence of paganism. He was alert at all times, and they could not spring a surprise upon him. He also took care not to give them any positions of authority which they might use as a base for their self-aggrandizement.

Some historians have claimed that the Prophet was eager to enlist the Banu Umayya in the service of Islam since they had many rare skills and talents. Von Grunebaum, for example, writes:

Muhammad for his part needed the experience of the Meccan ruling class; the expansion of the umma and above all its fundamental organization could not be administered without the help of the men of the city. (Classical Islam – A History 600-1258, 1970)

This is one of those claims which cannot be upheld against scrutiny. There is no evidence that the Prophet ever put the "experience" of the Banu Umayya to any use. Equally fatuous is the claim that the expansion of the umma and its fundamental organization could not be administered without them. If the Banu Umayya had the abilities attributed to them, why they didn't put them to use in their cynical war against Muhammad and Islam, and why were they defeated?Muhammad, the Messenger of God, created and consolidated the Islamic State in the teeth of the Umayyad opposition. The Islamic State could not coexist with the pagan oligarchy of Makkah which was headed by the Banu Umayya, and he had to destroy it. He was not impressed by their "abilities" before or after their acceptance of Islam, and he did not appoint any of them as a general or an administrator or a judge or anything. This component of his policy toward them could not be more explicit.

Some Sunni historians have pointed out that the Prophet appointed Muawiya, the son of Abu Sufyan and Hinda, his "scribe" to record the Qur'anic verses. Muawiya may have written down some verses of Qur'an but it does not mean that they could not be recorded without him. There were many scribes available to the Prophet. In the first place, when Muawiya became a Muslim, most of the Qur'an had already been revealed, and there was little, if anything, for him to write. In the second place, he was only one out of a multitude of scribes. If writing the verses of Qur'an is a "distinction" for him, then he shares it with many other copyists. After all, Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, the foster-brother of Uthman bin Affan was also a scribe. He distorted the verses of Qur'an as he wrote them down. The Prophet declared him to be an apostate. He was going to be executed but was saved by Uthman. The Prophet banished him from Medina.

Muawiya's skill as a scribe, therefore, was not one that was in short supply at the court of the Medina. The historians have preserved the names of 29 scribes of the Prophet.

Nevertheless, the statement of Von Grunebaum quoted above, would, in effect, be correct, if it is slightly modified to read that it was not the Prophet of Islam but Abu Bakr and Umar who needed the experience and the expertise of the Banu Umayya, and it were both of them who could not administer the new state without their support. The Banu Umayya were indispensable for Abu Bakr and Umar. The story of the revival of the Banu Umayya during the caliphates of Abu Bakr and Umar is told in another chapter.

The Prophet did, however, try to mollify the Umayyads with dowsers in the hope that they would shed their hostility to Islam, and some day, they themselves or their children would become sincere Muslims. But his efforts were fruitless. Nothing that he did for them, ever softened their hearts toward Islam. They never acquired a sense of identity with Islam or an allegiance to it. They were emotionally, constitutionally and ideologically unable to come to terms with it. Only by failing to achieve their aims by the sword, did they recognize the virtues and accept the mandate of peace. But for them, only the means had changed, not the end.

The day Abu Sufyan; his wife Hinda, their son Muawiya, and other members of the clan of Umayya, accepted Islam, the Trojan Horse of polytheism also entered the fortress of Islam. Ali ibn Abi Talib, the philosopher of Islam, summed up the nature of the conversion of the Banu Umayya to Islam as follows:

"Banu Umayya have not become true believers. They have only submitted to a superior force."

In giving this verdict upon the conversion of the Banu Umayya to Islam, Ali was paraphrasing the following verse from the Book of God:

The Arabs say: 'We have adopted the Faith (amanna)'. Say (to them): "Faith ye have not. Rather say: 'We have become Muslim (aslamna). For Faith has not yet entered your hearts.'" (Chapter 49; verse 15)

The Prophet of Islam spent a fortnight in Makkah educating the newly converted Makkans into Islam, and in organizing the government of that city. He had "de-contaminated" the Kaaba, and the Muslims were now in possession of a city which was the social, political, cultural, commercial and religious hub of Arabia. All the Arab tribes now recognized the authority of his government as paramount.

The Prophet consolidated the new acquisitions of territories between Makkah and Medina and the areas around Makkah. He then set to work to reorganize the Arab society. In the past, the Arabs had familiarity only with basic tribal and kinship structures in their social organization but now they had become a "nation" (umma) under his leadership. Their loyalties as Muslims, did not take into account racial origins, tribal affiliations, national or linguistic attachments or even geographical boundaries. The loyalties of the Muslims transcended all natural barriers and man-made distinctions. They had to give their new loyalty to the Community of the Faithful which acknowledged God as One, and Muhammad as His Messenger.

Many tribes around Makkah were still heathen, and the Prophet wanted to invite them to Islam. Also, there were other tribes which had accepted Islam but had not paid their taxes to the State treasury, and he wished to remind them to pay those dues. He, therefore, sent missionaries and tax-collectors in various directions, with specific instructions on their duties, responsibilities and powers.

One of these tax-collectors was Khalid bin al-Walid. The Prophet sent him to the tribe of Banu Jadhima to collect unpaid taxes but he overstepped his authority, and stained his hands with innocent Muslim blood!

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

Khalid's expedition after the conquest of Makkah to the B. Jadhima of Kinana and Ali's expedition to repair Khalid's error.

Hakim told me that the Apostle summoned Ali and told him to go to these people and look into the affair, and abolish the practices of the pagan era. So Ali went to them with the money the Apostle had sent and paid the bloodwit and made good their monetary loss. When all blood and property had been paid for he still had some money left over. He asked if any compensation was still due and when they said it was not, he gave them the rest of the money on behalf of the Apostle. Then he returned and reported to the Apostle what he had done and he commended him. Then the Apostle arose and facing the Qibla, raised his arms,

and said: O God! I am innocent before Thee of what Khalid has done. This he did thrice.

Khalid and Abdur Rahman b. Auf had sharp words about this matter. The latter said to him: "You have done a pagan act in Islam." Khalid said that he had only avenged Abdur Rahman's father. He answered that he was a liar because he himself had killed his father's slayer; but Khalid had taken vengeance for his uncle so that there was bad feeling between them.

Hearing of this the Apostle said (to Khalid): "Leave my companions alone, for by God if you had a mountain of gold and spent it for God's sake, you would not approach the merit of my companions." (The Life of the Prophet)

Washington Irving

On a certain mission (on his way to Tehama) Khalid bin Waleed had to pass through the country of the tribe of Jadsima. He had with him 350 men and was accompanied by Abdur Rahman, one of the earliest proselytes of the faith. His instructions from the Prophet were to preach peace and goodwill, to inculcate the faith, and to abstain from violence, unless assailed.

Most of the tribe of Jadsima had embraced Islam but some were still of the Sabean religion. On a former occasion this tribe had plundered and slain an uncle of Khalid, also the father of Abdur Rahman, as they were returning from Arabia Felix. Dreading that Khalid and his host might take vengeance for those misdeeds, they armed themselves on their approach.

Khalid secretly rejoiced at seeing them ride forth to meet him in this military array. Hailing them with an imperious tone, he demanded whether they were Moslems or infidels. They replied in faltering accents, "Moslems." "Why then come ye forth to meet us with weapons in your hand?" "Because we have enemies among some of the tribes who may attack us unawares," they said.

Khalid sternly ordered them to dismount and lay by their weapons. Some complied, and were instantly seized and bound; the rest fled.

Taking their flight as a confession of guilt, he pursued them with great slaughter; laid waste the country, and in the effervescence of his zeal even slew some of the prisoners.

Mohammed, when he heard of this unprovoked outrage, raised his hands to heaven, and called God to witness that he was innocent of it. Khalid when upbraided with it on his return, would fain have shifted the blame on Abdur Rahman, but Mohammed rejected indignantly any imputation against one of the earliest and worthiest of his followers. The generous Ali was sent forthwith to restore to the people of Jadsima what Khalid had wrested from them, and to make pecuniary compensation to the relatives of the slain.

It was a mission congenial with Ali's nature, and he executed it faithfully. Inquiring into the losses and sufferings of each individual, he paid him to his full content. When every loss was made good, and all blood atoned for, he distributed the remaining money among the people, gladdening every heart by his bounty. So Ali received the thanks and praises of the Prophet, but the vindictive Khalid was rebuked even by those whom he had thought to please. "Behold!" said he to Abdur Rahman, "I have avenged the death of your father." "Rather say," replied the other indignantly, "thou hast avenged the death of thine uncle. Thou has disgraced the faith by an act worthy of an idolater." (The Life of Mohammed)

Sir John Glubb

After the occupation of Mecca, emissaries were sent to the surrounding tribes to urge them to destroy their local idols and pagan shrines. One such party was commanded by Khalid bin Waleed, the victor of Uhud. Khalid was a highly successful fighter but a headstrong, violent and bloodthirsty man. He was sent to Beni Jadheema clan of Beni Kinana, on the coastal plain south-west of Mecca.

By a tragic coincidence, these Beni Jadheema had killed Khalid's uncle many years before, when he was returning from a business trip to the Yemen. The Apostle, who was probably unaware that Khalid had a private feud with the people he was sent to convert, had told him to avoid bloodshed. When he reached Beni Jadheema, Khalid told them to lay down their arms as the war was over and everyone had now

accepted Islam. When they had done so, however, he suddenly seized a number of the men, tied their hands behind their backs, and gave orders that they be beheaded, as satisfaction for the murder of his uncle.

An Arab horseman who was with Khalid's force, subsequently told how a young man of Beni Jadheema, his hands tied, asked him to allow him to speak to some women who were standing a little way apart. The Muslim agreed and led the prisoner across to the women. "Goodby, Hubaisha," the youth said to a girl among them, "my life is at an end now." But she cried out, "No, no, may your life be prolonged for many years to come." The prisoner was led back and immediately decapitated. As he fell, the girl broke away from the group of women and ran to him. Bending over him, she covered him with kisses, refusing to let go until they killed her also.

The Apostle was genuinely horrified when he heard of Khalid's action. Standing in the courtyard of Kaaba, he raised his hands above his head and cried aloud: "O God! I am innocent before Thee of what Khalid has done." Ali was sent immediately with a large sum of cash to pay blood-money for all who had been killed, and generous compensation for any losses of property. (The Life and Times of Mohammed, 1970, p. 320)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Muhammad resided in Makkah fifteen days during which he organized its affairs and instructed its people in Islam. During this period, he sent forth delegations to call men peaceably to Islam to destroy the idols without shedding any blood. Khalid ibn al-Walid was sent to Nakhlah to destroy al-Uzza, goddess of Banu Shayban. His task accomplished, ibn al-Walid proceeded to Jadhimah. There, however, the people took up arms at his approach. Khalid asked them to lay down their arms on the grounds that all people had accepted Islam. One of the Jadhimah tribesmen said to his people: "Woe to you, Banu Jadhimah! Don't you know that this is Khalid? By God, nothing awaits you once you have laid down your arms except captivity, and once you have become captives, you can expect nothing but death." Some of his people answered: "Do you seek to have us all murdered? Don't you know that most men have converted to Islam, that the war is over, and that security is reestablished?" Those who held this opinion continued to talk to their tribesmen until the latter surrendered their arms. Thereupon, ibn al-Walid ordered them to be

bound, and he killed some of them. When he heard the news, the Prophet lifted his arms to heaven and prayed:"O God! I condemn what Khalid ibn al-Walid has done."

The Prophet gave funds to Ali ibn Abi Talib and sent him to look into the affairs of this tribe, cautioning him to disregard all the customs of pre-Islam. Upon arrival, Ali paid the blood-wit of all the victims and compensated the property owners for their damages.

Before leaving, he surrendered the rest of the money which the Prophet had given him to the tribe just in case there were any other losses which may have escaped notice at the time. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

The demarche that Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, made toward Banu Jadhima, through Ali, was absolutely essential. Khalid had killed people who were not only Muslim but also were innocent of all guilt. Failure to make amends for his crimes would have earned for the Muslims a reputation not only for senseless cruelty and wanton abuse of power but also for treachery. The pagans and those Arabs who could be called Muslims, at this early date, only by courtesy, would, inevitably, have linked the foul deeds of Khalid with the Prophet himself. There was even the danger that they would have repudiated Islam and relapsed into idolatry, just to spite Khalid. The Prophet, therefore, went into Kaaba, and thrice denounced Khalid's act, and called upon Heaven to be a Witness that he bore no responsibility for it.

The Banu Jadhima were left stripped and utterly broken by Khalid. The Prophet wanted not only to comfort them and to rehabilitate them but also to win back their confidence and love. It was a most difficult and delicate task, and he chose Ali to carry it out. Khalid had tarnished the image of Islam, and the Prophet knew that no one among his companions except Ali had the ability to restore to it its pristine sheen.

Ali proved once again that his master could not have chosen anyone better than him for this sensitive assignment, and he demonstrated once again that if he was the first in war, he was also the first in peace. He astonished and enchanted the Banu Jadhima with his sincerity, his generosity, his friendliness, and his genuine solicitude for their happiness and welfare.

With his quality of address, Ali recaptured the hearts of Banu Jadhima for his master, Muhammad Mustafa, and for Islam. This was a role that was "custom-designed" for him to play. He loved this role more than any other. He loved to dress the psychological wounds of other people, and he loved to bring cheer and comfort to broken hearts. He was endowed with a very special flair to carry through a role like this.

Chapter 33

The Battle of Hunayn

The conquest of Makkah triggered the mass conversion of the Arabs to Islam in many parts of the country. But there were some tribes living in the east and south-east of Makkah which did not wish to abjure idolatry. They were alarmed at the rapid progress of Islam, and they thought that if it continued to spread at the same speed, they would soon be surrounded by the Muslims, and would become isolated from other pagan tribes. Their leaders figured that it would be unwise on their part to let the Muslims consolidate their recent gains and become too strong. They, therefore, decided to act immediately by attacking the Muslims in Makkah and destroying them. The leading tribes among them were the Thaqeef, Hawazin, Banu Sa'ad and Banu Jashm, all fierce warriors, jealous of their independence and proud of their warlike traditions. They had noted that Makkah had surrendered to Muhammad without striking a blow but they attributed the failure of the Quraysh to resist him, to their effeminacy. As for themselves, they were confident that they were more than a match on the battle-field for the warriors of Islam or any other warriors.

In late January 630, the Prophet received intelligence that Thaqeef and Hawazin had left their home base, and were moving toward Makkah. When these reports were confirmed, he too ordered a general mobilization in the newly-conquered city.

The Prophet didn't want Makkah to become a battle-ground. He, therefore, hastily left Makkah on January 26, 630 at the head of 12,000 warriors, to meet the enemy. Out of this force, ten thousand men were from Medina, and the other two thousand were recruits from the newly-converted Makkans.

This new army was the largest force ever assembled in Arabia to that date. As its various formations marched out of the city gate, in full panoply of war, Abu Bakr who was watching, was much impressed, and exclaimed: "We cannot be defeated this time because of lack of numbers." But very soon he was proven wrong. Muslims were defeated at the beginning even though they were thrice as numerous as the enemy. Qur'an itself called attention of the Muslims, rather pointedly, that numbers alone were no guarantee that they would be victorious.

Sir William Muir

Four weeks had just elapsed since he (Mohammed) had quitted Medina, when he marched forth from Mecca at the head of all his forces, swelled now, by the addition of 2000 auxiliaries from Mecca, to the large number of 12,000 men. Safwan, at his request, made over to him one hundred suits of mail and stand of arms complete, and as many camels. The array of tribes, each with a banner waving at its head, was so imposing that Abu Bakr broke forth, as the marshaled forces passed, with the exclamation: "We shall not this day be worsted by reason of the smallness of our numbers." (Life of Mohammed, London, 1861)

When the first column constituting the Muslim vanguard, commanded by Khalid ibn al-Walid, entered the valley of Hunayn in the south-east of Makkah, the enemy was already lying in ambush, ready to greet it with his missile weapons. The pass was narrow, the road was very rough, and the Muslims were advancing apparently unaware of the enemy's presence. It was just before dawn when all of a sudden, the Hawazin launched their attack.

The surprise was complete and the charge of the enemy was so impetuous that the Muslims could not withstand it. The vanguard, composed of the tribesmen of Banu Sulaym, broke and fled. The main body of the army was just behind. Khalid's column ran smack into its face, and struck panic into its men so that they also turned their backs to the enemy, and began to run. Soon everyone in the army was running, and it was not long before Muhammad was left alone with a handful of his faithful followers around him.

The men led by Khalid were the first to run before the charging enemy, and they were followed by the newly-converted Umayyads of

Makkah and their friends and supporters. Behind them were the citizens of Medina. Many Muslims were killed in the stampede, and many others were wounded. The Apostle called out the fugitives but no one listened to him.

The army of Islam was in headlong rout with the enemy at full tilt in pursuit. The Apostle, of course, did not abandon his post, and stood firm like a rock. Eight men were still with him, all watching the spectacle of the flight of their army. They were:

1. Ali ibn Abi Talib
2. Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib
3. Fadhl ibn Abbas
4. Abu Sufyan ibn al-Harith ibn Abdul Muttalib
5. Rabi'a, the brother of Abu Sufyan ibn al-Harith
6. Abdullah ibn Masood
7. Usama ibn Zayd ibn Haritha
8. Ayman ibn Obaid

Out of these eight, the first five belonged to the clan of Banu Hashim. They were the uncle and the cousins of the Prophet.

The Prophet asked his uncle, Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib, to call the fleeing Muslims. Abbas had a very powerful voice, and he shouted: "O ye Muhajireen and O ye Ansar! O ye victors of Badr and O ye men of the Tree of Fealty! Where are you going? The Messenger of God is here. Come back to him."

The voice of Abbas boomed in the narrow valley and almost everyone heard it, and it proved effective in checking the flight of the Muslims.

The Ansar were the first to halt, and to return to the battle. Inspired by their example, others also rallied. Soon they were able to regroup. A fierce skirmish took place. At first, the issue appeared uncertain but then the Muslims began to press the enemy. Once they recovered their morale, they went on the offensive. The enemy still fought bravely but was hampered in his mobility by the vast number of women and children he had brought with him. The Muslims pressed their advantage and then it was the Bedouins who were running in all directions.

Sir William Muir has told the story of the rout and rally of the Muslims in the battle of Hunayn at some length. He writes in his book, The Life of Mohammed, (London, 1877):

Very early in the morning, while the dawn was yet gray, and the sky overcast with clouds, the army of Mohammed was in motion. Clad in full panoply, as on the day of Ohod, he rode on his white mule, Duldul, in the rear of the forces.

The vanguard, formed of the Banu Sulaim and led by Khalid, were defiling leisurely up the steep and narrow pass, when on a sudden the Hawazin sprang forth from their ambuscade, and charged them with impetuosity. Staggered by the unexpected onslaught, the Banu Sulaim broke and fell back. The shock was communicated from column to column. Aggravated by the obscurity of the hour, and the straitness and ruggedness of the road, panic seized the whole army; all turned and fled. As troop by troop they hurried past him, Mohammed called out: "Whither away? The Prophet of the Lord is here! Return! Return! – but his words had no effect, excepting that a band of devoted friends and followers gathered round him.

The confusion increased, the multitude of camels jostled wildly one against another; all was noise and clamor, and the voice of Mohammed was lost amid the din. At last, seeing the column of Medina troops bearing down in common flight, he bade his uncle, Abbas, who held his mule, to cry aloud: "O citizens of Medina! O men of the Tree of Fealty! Ye of the Sura Bacr!" Abbas had a stentorian voice, and as he shouted these words over and over again at the pitch of his voice, they were heard far and near. At once they touched a chord in the hearts of the men of Medina. They were arrested in their flight, and hastened to Mohammed, crying aloud, "Ya Labeik! Here we are at thy call!" One hundred of these devoted followers, disengaged with difficulty from the camels that jammed the narrow pass, threw themselves upon the advancing enemy and checked his progress. Relieved from the pressure, the army rallied gradually, and returned to the battle. The conflict was severe; and the issue, from the adverse nature of the ground and the impetuosity of the wild Bedouins, remained for some time doubtful. Mohammed ascended an eminence and watched the struggle. Excited by the spectacle, he began loudly to exclaim: "Now is the furnace heated: I am the Prophet that lieth not. I am the offspring of Abdul Muttalib."

Then bidding Abbas to pick up for him a handful of gravel, he cast it towards the enemy, saying, "Ruin seize them!" They had indeed already wavered. The steadiness of the Medina band, and the enthusiasm of the rest when once recalled, had won the day. The enemy fled, and the rout was complete. Many were slain and so fiercely did the Moslems pursue the charge, that they killed among the rest some of the little children – an atrocity which Mohammed had strictly forbidden.

Betty Kelen

They (the Muslims) camped short of Hunayn Valley and at dawn advanced on the enemy through a defile. Umar's son described what happened then:

"We came down through a wadi, wide and sloping descending gradually in the morning twilight; but the enemy was there before us and had hidden in the by-paths, side-tracks and narrow places. They were in force, fully armed and knowing exactly what to do, and by God, we were terrified when we descended and suddenly the Hawazin came down on us as one man!

The Bedouin attacked with stones, boulders, arrows, lance and sword. Muhammad's van, under General Khalid, broke, the camels jostling and crashing, screeching and tangling up their long legs.

He (Muhammad) saw among the fleeing men his new converts from Mecca, and he called to them as one of their own: 'Where are you going men? Come back! Come to me! I am God's Apostle. I am Muhammad, son of Abdullah!'

Not one of them heeded, and why should they? There was a Hawazin warrior after them on a russet camel, his standard flying from the long lance, and every time he dipped the blade of that lance, it showed up on the other side of someone's chest. The Prophet's voice was drowned in the uproar of men, the clamor of camels. He asked his uncle Abbas, a man with a mighty lung, to take up the cry, 'O comrades, remember the acacia tree… ' And Ali, so quiet in peace but in battle like a demon, lunged viciously about him, fighting to get behind the Hawazin leader's camel and hamstring it… " (Muhammad, Messenger of God)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

The Muslims arrived at Hunayn in the evening and camped at the entrance of the valley until dawn. At dawn the following day the army began to move, and Muhammad, riding his white mule, was in the rear while Khalid ibn al-Walid, commanding a group of soldiers from Banu Sulaym, was in the vanguard.

As the Muslims passed through the canyon of Hunayn, Malik ibn Awf ordered his army to attack in the darkness before dawn, first with arrows and then with a general charge. The Muslims' ranks broke up and were stricken with panic. Some of them ran out of the canyon as fast as they could in search of safety. Witnessing what had befallen the Muslims, Abu Sufyan felt no little pleasure at the defeat of his previous enemies who until now had been celebrating their victory over Makkah. He said, "The Muslims will not be checked until they are thrown into the sea." (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

The pagan tribesmen were defeated but they were able to regroup, and are said to have retreated in good order from the valley of Hunayn.

D. S. Margoliouth

The general, Malik son of Auf, is said to have rallied his horsemen sufficiently to make them hold their ground till the weaker members of the party were covered, and then to have brought them safely to an eminence whence they could make their way to Taif. There apparently some of the women were saved, though others fell in the hands of the Moslems. Khalid son of al-Waleed, whose savagery had already won a rebuke from the Prophet, earned a fresh one by thinking it his duty to kill these amazons; an act which was totally against the Prophet's ideas of gallantry.

Just as he found it necessary to rebuke others who had thought it their duty to slaughter the children of the unbelievers. "What are the best of you," he asked, "if not the children of unbelievers?"

A highly important success was gained, and the Prophet's fortune proved constant at a time when a reverse would have had serious

consequences; for Abu Sufyan might have been equal to taking advantage of a disaster, though not sufficiently energetic to have caused one. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

Hunayn was the last battle led personally by Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God. The battle began with the rout of the Muslims, and they fled every which way to save their own lives, utterly oblivious of the presence, in the battlefield, of their Prophet. In the end, however, they were victorious, thanks to the courage and resolution of the Prophet himself and a few of his kinsfolk.

M. Shibli, the Indian historian, writes in his biography of the Prophet:

Instead of victory (of the Muslims) one could see their rout (in the battle of Hunayn). The Prophet looked around and found no one with him except a handful of his friends. Abu Qatada, a Companion, who was present in Hunayn, says that when the army was on the run, he saw Umar bin al-Khattab, and asked him: "What is the state of the affairs of the Muslims?" He said: "Such is the Will of God." (The Life of the Prophet (Seeratun-Nabi, Vol. I, pp.535-536), 1976, Azamgarh, India).

Sir William Muir

The reverse sustained at the opening of the day, was attributed by the Prophet to the vainglorious confidence with which the believers looked upon their great army. The subsequent success was equally ascribed tothe aid of invisible hosts which fought against their enemy. The engagement is thus alluded to in the Coran:

Verily God hath assisted you in many battlefields: and on the day of Honein, when indeed ye rejoiced in the multitude of your host. But their great number did not in any wise benefit you: the earth became too strait for you with all its spaciousness. Then ye turned your backs and fled. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877, p. 143)

The "invisible hosts" which assisted the Muslims, means, in this context, high morale. At the beginning of the battle, they were defeated and routed. But they were inspired by the example of the Prophet himself whose courage restored their morale, and they fought the enemy with new zeal and vigor.

The battle of Uhud had begun with the victory of the Muslims and had ended with their defeat; the battle of Hunayn began with their defeat and ended with their victory. There was a great slaughter of the Muslims at the beginning which was caused by their own panic and irresolution.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Victory was not gained cheaply. The Muslims paid a very high price. They could have done it at much lesser cost had they not fallen back at the beginning and occasioned Abu Sufyan's derisive remark that they would be thrown into the sea. Although the primary source books have not listed all the casualties of the battle, they did mention that two Muslim tribes were almost totally annihilated, and that the Prophet held a funerary prayer for them. Partially offsetting this tremendous loss of human lives, was the unquestioned supremacy the victory brought to the Muslims. Moreover, victory brought more captives and booty for them than they had ever seen before. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Ali and the Battle of Hunayn

The hero of the battle of Hunayn was Ali ibn Abi Talib just as he was the hero of all the preceding battles. At a time when all the companions had fled from the battlefield, and only eight men were left with the Apostle, it was Ali who stood between him and the enemy, and defended him. The tribesmen charged repeatedly but he repulsed them each time same as he had done in Uhud. For sometime, it was Uhud again.

Eventually, Ali succeeded in turning the tide of the battle. First he caused Uthman bin Abdullah, one of the leaders of the enemy, to fall from his camel, lose his balance, and be killed; and later, he killed, in a hand-to-hand fight, Abu Jerdel, the Hawazin leader. When these two generals were killed, the enemy lost heart; when he lost heart, he lost the battle.

M. Shibli

Banu Malik of the Thakeef fought with determined bravery but when their leader, Uthman bin Abdullah, was killed, they began to waver… (The Life of the Prophet, Azamgarh, India, 1976)

Abu Sufyan, the chief of the Banu Umayya, was present in the camp of the Muslims, as noted above. Though he had "accepted" Islam, he was thrilled to see the flight of the Muslims, and hoped that they would be thrown into the sea. When Hikda bin Umayya, another "Muslim" of the clan of Banu Umayya, saw the rout of the Muslims, at the beginning of the battle, he remarked: "At last the spell of Muhammad is broken." Both of them must have conjured up, in their imagination, pictures of reinstating Hubal, their dynastic god, to his throne in the Kaaba.

Abu Sufyan and other members of his clan, were unable to conceal their pleasure when to them it appeared that the Muslims were defeated by the pagan tribesmen. But their pleasure proved to be too short-lived. Soon there was a reversal in the fortunes of the battle, and then it were the latter who were finally and decisively defeated. This reversal must have caused great heart-burning to Abu Sufyan and his clansmen as they lost the last, best hope they had of reviving "the Times of Ignorance."

The tribemen had abandoned all their baggage and thousands of their animals. The Apostle ordered the baggage to be collected, the animals to be corralled and taken to Jirana, a place mid-point between Taif and Makkah, and to be kept there pending his own arrival. In the meantime, he decided to capture Taif which still held out as the last stronghold of the infidels, and ordered the main body of the army to march on that city. The fugitives from the battle had also found sanctuary in the fortress of Taif.

On his way to Taif, the Apostle rode past a small crowd of people who were standing around the body of a slain woman. Upon enquiry, he learned that she had been killed by Khalid bin al-Walid.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

One of our companions told us that the Apostle that day (just after the battle of Hunayn) passed by a woman whom Khalid bin al-Waleed had killed while men had gathered around her. When he heard what had happened, he sent word to Khalid and forbade him to kill child, woman or hired slave. (The Life of the Messenger of God)

The Apostle laid siege to Taif but it was abortive and was abandoned. Taif, however, voluntarily surrendered some weeks later.

From Taif, the Apostle went to Jirana to distribute the spoils of war which had been amassed at the field of Hunayn. The share he gave to Abu Sufyan and his sons, the leaders of the clan of Umayya, was larger than the share he gave to anyone else in the camp of Islam. The Umayyads could not believe they had such good fortune. Abu Sufyan, who had good reason to expect less than nothing, after his "performance" in the battle of Hunayn, was carried away by the generosity of the Prophet, and gushed forth to him: "You are generous in war no less than you are generous in peace."

Some Orientalists have suggested that the share which the Apostle gave to Abu Sufyan and his sons, was actually a bribe to keep them Muslims, and that there was no other way he could have won their loyalty. They further say that the Apostle never hesitated to bribe the idolaters if he thought that they would sell their "faith" to him in exchange for camels, sheep, and trinkets and baubles.

We disagree with them. After the conquest of Makkah, Abu Sufyan, his sons and other members of Banu Umayya, were at the mercy of Muhammad. He could have exterminated them, and all the idolaters of Arabia could not have done anything to save them. It was not necessary for him to bribe them or anyone else into accepting Islam. Of little worth was their acceptance of Islam anyway. In bestowing gifts upon Abu Sufyan and his sons, the Prophet of Islam was only demonstrating his own freedom from vindictiveness. For Arabs, it will be remembered, vindictiveness was second nature. He tried to wear out their hostility to Islam by his kindness and generosity. The gifts were a gesture symbolic only of this attitude.

Abu Sufyan, his sons and other Umayyads - the recipients of the gifts, were called, ever after Muallafa Qulubuhum – those whose hearts were gained over. The Prophet gave his enemies large shares out of the booty only for their Taleef al-Qulub – gaining over their hearts.

Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah says in his book, Introduction to Islam, p. 80, (1977):

Those whose hearts are to be won are of many kinds. The great jurist, Abu Ya'la al-Farra, points out: "As for those whose hearts are to be won, they are of four kinds:

1. Those whose hearts are to be reconciled for coming to the aid of the Muslims;
2. Those whose hearts are to be won in order that they might abstain from doing harm to Muslims;
3. Those who are attracted towards Islam;
4. Those by whose means conversion to Islam becomes possible for the members of their tribes.

It is lawful to benefit each and every one of these categories of ‘those whose hearts are to be won,' be they Muslims or polytheists." Abu Sufyan and his clan belong to the second category; their hearts were to be "won in order that they might abstain from doing harm to the Muslims."

The Ansar and the Spoils of Hunayn

Some young men of the Ansar were disgruntled at what they considered to be an "unfair" distribution of the spoils of war. A few among them murmured that when time came to distribute the booty, the Prophet gave "preferential treatment" to the Quraysh. When the Prophet heard this, he ordered the Ansar to assemble in a tent, and he addressed them thus:

"What is it that I hear from you, O Ansar, about the apportionment of booty? Are you roiled up because I gave a larger share of the booty to the Makkans than I gave you? But tell me this: is it not true that you worshipped idols and God gave you guidance through me? Is it not true that you were riven by civil discord and God united you through me? Is it not true that you were poor and God made you rich through me?"

In answer to each question, the Ansar said: "Yes, that is so, and it is the grace of God and His Apostle."

But these questions were merely rhetorical, and the Apostle of God himself answered them.

Sir William Muir

"… but ye might have answered (and answered truly, for I would have verified it myself) – thou camest to Medina rejected as an impostor, and we bore witness to thy veracity; you camest as a helpless fugitive and we assisted thee; an outcast, and we gave thee an asylum; destitute, and we solaced thee. Why are ye disturbed in mind because of the things of this life, wherewith I have sought to incline the hearts of these men (the Quraysh of Makkah) unto Islam, whereas ye are already steadfast in your faith? Are ye not satisfied that others should obtain the flocks and the camels, while ye carry back the Prophet of the Lord unto your homes? No, I will not leave you for ever. If all mankind went one way, and the men of Medina another way, verily, I would go the way of the men of Medina. The Lord be favorable unto them, and bless them, and their sons and their sons' sons for ever." (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1861)

When the Ansar heard these words, they were smothered with tears, and they cried: "Let others take the sheep, the cattle and the camels with them. All we want is Muhammad, and nothing else."

The Ansar had also entertained the fear that the Prophet might decide to stay in Makkah, and make it his capital. But he reassured them that he would never leave them or Medina, and that he and they were inseparable forever.

From Jirana, the Muslims returned to Makkah where the Prophet performed the seven circuits of the Kaaba, and carried out the rites of the Lesser Pilgrimage (Umra).

The Battle of Hunayn was the last "flash in the pan" of pagan Arabia. When the Muslims won the victory, the curtain finally fell on the savage and pagan prologue of the drama of the Arabian history. But pagan or rather crypto-pagan Arabs were still going to fight a long and bitter rearguard action against Islam.

In Makkah, the Prophet gave finishing touches to matters relating to administration and policy. Before leaving Makkah for Medina, he appointed Akib bin Usayd as governor of the city. This was the first permanent civil appointment in Islam. He also declared Makkah to be the religious capital of Islam.

After spending a most eventful month in Makkah and its environs, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, and his army, returned to Medina.

D. S. Margoliouth

By giving the empire of Islam a religious capital, at no time utilized as a political capital, the founder got for it a mainstay which has secured the continuity of the system amid the most violent convulsions.

The visit to Mecca which had been accompanied by so many vicissitudes was terminated by the Prophet going through the ceremonies of the lesser pilgrimage. Afterwards, Akib, son of Usaid, was appointed governor of Mecca at a salary of a dirhem a day; this was the first permanent civil appointment made in Islam; at Khaibar, the only other city of importance which the Moslems had captured, the local government had been left. Besides the governor, a spiritual official was left, Mu'adh, son of Jabal, a native of Medina, in whose competence to teach the new religion the Prophet had confidence.The Apostle returned to Medina with the Muslim host after an absence of more than a month. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

Chapter 34

The Expedition of Tabuk

The battle of Mootah in which the Muslims were defeated, was fought in September 629. Their defeat was interpreted in many circles as a sign of decline in the power of the new Islamic State. The Arab freebooters must have found it very tempting to attack Medina after this fancied decline. But in the summer of 630, rumors were circulating in Medina that it were not the North Arabian tribes but the Roman troops which were massing at the Syrian frontier for an invasion of Hijaz.

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, decided to take preventive action for the defense of Medina, and ordered his followers to prepare themselves for a long campaign in the north.

It was the month of September, and the weather in Hijaz that year was exceedingly hot. Furthermore, a protracted draught threatened the province with conditions of semi-famine. The response of the Muslims, therefore, to the call-up was very lukewarm. They did not wish to leave their homes at a time like this.

Sir John Glubb

In September or October 630 the Messenger of God gave orders to prepare for an expedition to the Byzantine frontier. The weather in the Hijaz was still oppressively hot, water and grazing were scarce, and the movements of a large force would be extremely difficult. Perhaps the memories of the disaster at Mootah deprived many men of the wish to face the Byzantines again. (The Life and Times of Mohammed)

The hypocrites in Medina seized this opportunity to plant disaffection in the minds of the neophytes in Islam. They not only did not take part in

the campaign but also tried to dissuadeothers from doing so. In an attempt to undermine the will and purpose of the Muslims, they began to spread alarmist stories that the antagonists this time were not the poor, ill-equipped, backward and ignorant tribal levies which fought without order and without discipline but the Romans who were the most civilized and the most powerful nation in the world, and who, in effect, would exterminate them (the Muslims).

Nevertheless, many Muslims responded to the appeal of the Prophet, and took up arms to defend the faith. When a head-count was taken, there were found to be 30,000 volunteers. It was the largest force ever assembled in Arabia until then.

The Prophet appointed Ali ibn Abi Talib his viceroy in Medina during his own absence. He selected Ali to be his viceroy for the following reasons:

1. He wanted to show to the rest of the world that he considered Ali to be more qualified than anyone else to be the ruler of all Muslims, and to be the head of the Islamic State. He, therefore, appointed him as his representative in his capital.

2. All fighting men were going with the expedition, leavingMedina without any troops. In the event of an attack upon the city by the nomadic predators, Ali could be counted upon to handle the situation by dint of his courage and ability.

3. Many hypocrites had stayed behind in Medina, and many others had deserted the army to return to the city. They were a potential threat to the security of the capital of Islam. The Prophet, therefore, selected a man to rule in his place who was capable of defending Medina against any pagan advance, either by external aggression or through internal subversion.

For the hypocrites there was nothing more disagreeable than to see Ali in authority over them. When the army left Medina, they began to whisper that the Apostle had left Ali in Medina because he wanted to get rid of him. Ali was mortified to hear that his master had found him a "burden." He, therefore, immediately went after the army and overtook it

at Jorf. The Apostle was surprised to see him but when he (Ali) explained why he came, he (the Apostle) said:

"These people are liars. I left you in Medina to represent me in my absence. Are you not content to be to me what Aaron was to Moses except that there will not be any prophet after me."

Washington Irving

Many have inferred from the foregoing that Mohammed intended Ali for his caliph or successor; that being the significance of the Arabic word used to denote the relation of Aaron to Moses. (The Life of Mohammed)

Ali was satisfied by the assurance that the Prophet gave him, and returned to Medina to take charge of his duties as viceroy.

When the Prophet gave audience to Ali in his camp at Jorf, some of his companions were with him. One of them was Saad bin Abi Waqqas, the future victor of the battle of Qadsiyya against the Persians. He reported to the other Muslims that it was in his presence that Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, told Ali that he (Ali) was to him (Muhammad) what Aaron was to Moses, except that he (Ali) was not a prophet.

After a laborious march the army arrived at the Syrian frontier, and halted at a hamlet called Tabuk but the Prophet could find no sign of the Roman army or of any other army or enemy. The frontier was peaceful and quiet. The reports he had heard in Medina about an imminent invasion by the Romans, were false.

Peace and tranquillity on the Syrian frontier is another proof that the Romans considered the battle of Mootah as nothing more than a foray by a band of desert Arabs. If Mootah had been such a titanic battle as some Muslim historians claim it was, the Romans would have maintained their garrisons on the border. But they didn't maintain even pickets much less garrisons!
The Messenger of God then pondered the next step to be taken in Tabuk.

Washington Irving

Calling a council of war, he (Mohammed) propounded thequestion whether or not to continue forward (from Tabuk). To this Omar replied drily: "If thou has the command of God to proceed further, do so." "If I had the command of God to proceed further," observed Mohammed, "I should not have asked thy counsel." (The Life of Mohammed)

Eventually, the Prophet decided not to advance into Syria but to return to Medina.

The army spent ten days in Tabuk. Though it had not been engaged in any action, its presence at the frontier had some salutary effects. Many northern tribes of Bedouins accepted Islam. Dauma-tul-Jandal, a strategic post between Medina and Syria, was acquired as new territory.

Just before the army left Tabuk, the monks of the monastery of St. Catherine in the valley of Sinai, came to see the Prophet. He gave them audience, and granted them a charter which is comparable to the Charter of Medina which he had granted to the Jews. Its main terms were:

1. The Muslims would protect the churches and monasteries of the Christians. They would not demolish any church property either to build mosques or to build houses for the Muslims.

2. All ecclesiastical property (of the Christians) would be exempt from every tax.

3. No ecclesiastical authority would ever be forced by the Muslims to abandon his post.

4. No Christian would ever be forced by the Muslims to become a convert to Islam.

5. If a Christian woman marries a Muslim, she would have full freedom to follow her own religion.

The army recuperated from the toil and fatigue of the long journey, and the Prophet gave it the signal to return home. He arrived in Medina after an absence of one month.

Chapter 35

The Proclamation of Surah Bara'ah or Al Tawbah

When the pilgrimage season of 9 A.H. arrived, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, had myriads of pressing duties demanding his immediate attention so that he was unable to leave Medina. He, therefore, sent Abu Bakr to Makkah as the leader of a group of three hundred pilgrims to conduct the rites of Hajj.

It was Abu Bakr's first real, out-front leadership role.

Abu Bakr and the pilgrims left Medina. A day after their departure, the Prophet received from Heaven a new revelation called Bara'ah or Al-Tawbah (Immunity or Repentence) – the ninth chapter of Qur'an, and he was specifically ordered to promulgate it in Makkah either personally or to delegate authority to do so to someone from his own family, but to no one else.

In compliance with this commandment of Heaven, Muhammad Mustafa called his cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, gave him his own mount to ride, and ordered him to take the new revelation to Makkah, and to promulgate it there in the assembly of the pilgrims – Muslim and pagan.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

When Al-Tawbah came down to the Prophet after he had sent Abu Bakr to superintend the hajj, someone expressed the wish that he would send it to Abu Bakr. He said: "No one shall transmit it from me but a man of my own house." Then he summoned Ali and said: "Take this section from the beginning of Al-Tawbah, and proclaim it to the people on the day of sacrifice when they assemble at Mina." (The Life of the Messenger of God)

Washington Irving

Mohammed sent Abu Bakr as commander of the pilgrims to Mecca, he himself being too occupied with public and domestic concerns to absent himself from Medina.

Not long afterwards Mohammed summoned his son-in-law and devoted disciple, Ali, and mounting him on the swiftest of his camels, urged him to hasten with all speed to Mecca, there to promulgate before the multitude of pilgrims assembled from all parts, an important sura of the Koran, just received from heaven.

Ali executed his mission with his accustomed zeal and fidelity. He reached the sacred city in the height of the great religious festival. He rose before an immense multitude assembled at the hill of Al-Akaba, and announced himself a messenger from the Prophet, bearing an important revelation. He then read the sura of which he was the bearer; in which the religion of the sword was declared in all its rigor.

When Abu Bakr and Ali returned to Medina, the former expressed surprise and dissatisfaction that he had not been made the promulgator of so important a revelation, as it seemed to be connected with his recent mission, but he was pacified by the assurance that all new revelations must be announced by the Prophet himself, or by some one of his immediate family. (The Life of Mohammed)

Sir William Muir

Towards the close of the pilgrimage, on the great day of sacrifice, at the place of casting stones near Mina, Ali read aloud to the multitudes who crowded round him in the narrow pass, the heavenly command.

Having finished the recitation of this passage, Ali continued: "I have been commanded to declare unto you that no Unbeliever shall enter paradise. No idolater shall after this year perform the pilgrimage; and no one shall make the circuit of the Holy House naked. Whosoever hath a treaty with the Prophet, it shall be respected till its termination. Four months are permitted to every tribe to return to their territories in security. After that the obligation of the Prophet ceaseth."

The vast concourse of pilgrims listened peaceably till Ali ended. Then they broke up and departed every man to his home, publishing to all the tribes throughout the peninsula the inexorable ordinance which they had heard from the lips of Ali. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

… After he (Ali) finished his recitation of the Quran, he continued in his own words: "O men, no unbeliever will enter Paradise; no polytheist will perform pilgrimage after this year; and no naked person will be allowed to circumambulate the Kaaba. Whoever has entered into a covenant with the Prophet of God – may God's peace and blessings be upon him – will have his covenant fulfilled as long as its term lasts." Ali proclaimed these four instructions to the people and then gave everybody four months of general peace and amnesty during which anyone could return safely home. From that time on, no idolater performed the pilgrimage and no naked person made the circuits of the Kaaba. From that day on, the Islamic State was established. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Ali ibn Abi Talib "rehearsed the Signs of God" in Mina, representing the Messenger of God. This should be borne in mind by the reader that "rehearsing the Signs of God" is a most important function. It is, in fact, so important that God Himself has assumed it. We read in Qur'an:

These are the signs of Allah: We rehearse them to thee in Truth: Verily thou art one of the Apostles. (Chapter 2; verse 252)

This is what We rehearse unto thee of the Signs And the message of Wisdom. (Chapter 3; verse 58)

These are the signs of Allah: We rehearse them to thee in Truth: And Allah means no injustice to any of His creatures. (Chapter 3; verse 108)

According to these verses, God Himself rehearsed His Signs to Muhammad, His Messenger, and the latter (once he heard them) rehearsed them to the rest of mankind. Rehearsing the Signs of God was one of his most important duties. The importance of this duty is highlighted by the following verses of Al-Qur'an al-Majid:

Our Lord! Send among them an Apostle of their own Who shall rehearse thy Signs to them and instruct Them in Scripture and Wisdom, and sanctify them For thou art exalted in Might, the Wise.(Chapter 2; verse 129)

A similar (favor have ye already received) in that We have sent among you an Apostle of your own, Rehearsing to you Our Signs, and sanctifying you, And instructing you in Scripture and Wisdom, And in new Knowledge. (Chapter 2; verse 151)

God did confer a great favor on the believers when He sent among them an Apostle from among themselves, Rehearsing unto them the Signs of God, sanctifying them, And instructing them in Scripture and Wisdom, While before that they had been in manifest Error. (Chapter 3; verse 164)

It is He who has sent amongst the unlettered An Apostle from among themselves, To rehearse to them His Signs, to sanctify them, And to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom, – Although they had been before, in manifest Error. (Chapter 62; verse 2)

According to these verses, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, had the following duties to perform:

1.Rehearsing the Signs of God to the people;
2.Instructing them in scripture and wisdom;
3.Sanctifying them;
4.Instructing them in new knowledge.

First to be mentioned among all the prophetic duties, is "rehearsing the Signs of God." It is so important that it takes precedence over all other duties of the Prophet.

Rehearsing the Signs of God has also been mentioned singly by Qur'an in the following verses:

Thus have We sent amongst a people before whom Have (other) peoples (gone and) passed away; In order that thou Mightest Rehearse

unto them what We send down unto thee By inspiration…. (Chapter 13; verse 30)

… And I am commanded to be of those who Bow in Islam to Allah's will, – and to rehearse the Qur'an: And if any accept Guidance, they do it for the good of their own Souls, And if any stray, say: "I am only a Warner." (Chapter 27; verses 91-92)

… Allah hath indeed sent down to you a Message, – An Apostle, who rehearses to you the Signs of Allah Containing clear explanations that he may lead forth those who believe and do righteous Deeds from the depths of Darkness into Light… (Chapter 65; verses 10-11)

Also, there is the following warning in Al-Qur'an al-Majid:

… Those who reject Faith in the Signs of Allah, will suffer the severest penalty (in the Hereafter) and Allah is Exalted in Might, Lord of Retribution. (Chapter 3; verse 4)

It was this duty – Rehearsing the Signs of Allah – that Ali ibn Abi Talib was called upon to discharge.

As noted above, in the Zil-Hajj of 9 A.H., Muhammad, the Messenger of God, was too busy to visit Makkah to perform Hajj, and to promulgate the newly-revealed Surah Bara'ah. Therefore, at the express command of God, he had to choose another man to carry out this duty. The man chosen was Ali ibn Abi Talib.

In 8 A.H. (A.D. 630) at the conquest of Makkah, Ali and his master, Muhammad Mustafa, had purified the House of Allah (Kaaba) from the idols of the Arabs. Ali had broken those idols into pieces, and had thrown the pieces out of the Kaaba. In 9 A.H. (A.D. 631), he purified the Kaaba from the idolaters themselves by announcing to them that they would not be admitted into its sacred precincts ever again.

The Hajj season of 9 A.H. was the last rally of the idolaters of Arabia in the precincts of the Kaaba or in Makkah.

God selected Ali ibn Abi Talib to restore His House (Kaaba) to the state of its pristine purity, and sent a special Fiat to Muhammad Mustafa,

His Messenger, to make His purpose known to him (to Ali). Ali, the slave of God, restored that Exalted and Blessed House to the same state in which the Prophets, Ibrahim and Ismail (A.S.), had left it many centuries earlier.

In proclaiming at Mina in 9 A.H., the State Policy of the Government of Islam, Ali was the "Instrument" of God, just as in 7 A.H., he had been the "Hand" of God that conquered Khyber for Islam, and laid the foundations of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

The story of the revelation and promulgation of Surah Bara’ah (9th chapter of Qur’an), proves that:

1.Ali ibn Abi Talib is a member of the family of Muhammad, Mustafa, the blessed Messenger of God.
2.The duties of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, can be performed, in his absence, only by Ali, and by no one else.
3.A representative or successor of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, can be selected only by God Himself or by His Messenger, but not by the Muslim umma (community, people).

4.Ali is the most highly qualified person to represent the Messenger of God, and there is no one better qualified than him.

5. The most important function of the Head of the Islamic State is to promulgate the Commandments of God on this earth. Though Abu Bakr was present on the spot in Makkah, he was not allowed to promulgate God's commandments; Ali ibn Abi Talib promulgated them.

Marmaduke Pickthall

Although Mecca had been conquered and its people were now Muslims, the official order of the pilgrimage had been changed; the pagan Arabs performing it in their manner and the Muslims in their manner. It was only after the pilgrims' caravan had left Al-Madinah in the ninth year of the Hijrah, when Al-Islam was dominant in North Arabia, that the Declaration of Immunity, as it is called, was revealed. The Prophet sent a copy of it by messenger to Abu Bakar, leader of the pilgrimage, with the instruction that Ali was to read it to the multitude at Mecca. Its purport was that after that year Muslims only were to make

the pilgrimage, exception being made for such of the idolaters as had a treaty with the Muslims and had never broken their treaty nor supported anyone against them. Such were to enjoy the privileges of their treaty for the term thereof, but when their treaty expired they would be as other idolaters. That proclamation marks the end of idol-worship in Arabia. (Introduction to the Translation of Holy Qur'an, Lahore, Pakistan, 1975)

It was the pleasure of Allah that His favorite slave, Ali ibn Abi Talib, should, by reading His Proclamation, put an end to idolatry in Arabia forever.

Chapter 36

The Last Expedition

After the conquest of Makkah many pagan tribes had become Muslim voluntarily whereas there were others which accepted Islam when the Prophet sent his missionaries to them to instruct them into the doctrines and practices of the faith. One of his missionaries was Ali ibn Abi Talib. His master sent him to Yemen in 10 A.H. to invite the Yemeni tribes to Islam.

Though the last expedition that the Prophet organized was the one which was to be sent to the Syrian frontier under the command of Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha, it never left Medina in his lifetime. Therefore, the expedition of Ramadan of 10 A.H. which he sent to Yemen under the command of Ali, was the last one which actually left Medina while he was still alive.

Ali arrived in Yemen with his cavalry in mid-winter, and he invited the tribesmen of Madhhaj to accept Islam, but they answered him with a volley of arrows and rocks whereupon he also signaled his troops to charge. They attacked the tribesmen and routed them but did not pursue them because Ali's mission was one of peace and not of war. His orders to his troops were to fight only in self-defense.

The Madhhaj sued for peace which Ali readily granted them, and he renewed his invitation to them to accept Islam. This time they and also the tribe of Hamdan responded to his call, and accepted Islam. Ali's mission was successful. All Yemen became Muslim through his efforts. He executed his mission, as ever, with splendid competence and confidence, and demonstrated that he was the missionary of Islam par excellence.

M. Shibli

The most powerful and influential group in Yemen was made up of the tribesmen of Hamdan. In late 8 A.H., the Apostle sent Khalid bin Walid to invite them to Islam. Khalid spent six months among them preaching Islam but could not win any converts, and his mission was a failure. He was a general and a conqueror but not a preacher and a missionary. At last the Apostle recalled him to Medina, and in his stead, sent Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Ali gathered the tribesmen of Hamdan in a plain, read before them the message of the Apostle of God, and presented Islam to them. This time they responded – by accepting Islam. The whole tribe became Muslim.

Ali sent a report on the outcome of his mission to the Apostle in Medina. When the latter read the report, he thanked God for His grace, and lifting his eyes toward Heaven, invoked blessings upon the tribe of Hamdan. This he did twice. (Sira-tun-Nabi, Vol. II, Tenth Edition, 1974, published by the Ma'arif Printing Press, Azamgarh, India).

During the last ten years of his life, the Prophet of Islam had organized eighty expeditions which left Medina on various missions – some warlike and others peaceful. Ali's expedition to Yemen is of especial interest because it was the last of them all. No other expedition left Medina in the lifetime of the Prophet.

The year 10 A.H. (A.D. 631) is called the Year of the Delegations. Many Arab tribes sent delegations to Medina both to accept Islam, and to give Muhammad Mustafa their pledge of allegiance as their temporal sovereign.

In year one of Hijri (A.D. 622) Medina had the status of a city-state but within ten years it had burgeoned into the capital of a "national" state. The whole peninsula had acknowledged its spiritual and temporal authority. Muhammad Mustafa, may God bless him and his house, had established internal peace in the whole country, and had taken effective steps to safeguard the "national" interests of the Muslim umma. There was no threat to the security of the Islamic State from any external aggression.

The Jews and the Christians were paying taxes or tribute (Jizya). They were enjoying all the rights of citizenship of the Islamic State, and they were enjoying full religious freedom. The Arabs, most of them now converted to Islam, were on the eve of a vigorous "national" renaissance. These were only a few of the countless blessings that Islam had brought to the Arabian peninsula.

Chapter 37

The Farewell Pilgrimage

IN DHUL-QIDAH, (THE 11TH MONTH OF THE ISLAMIC CALENDAR) OF THE YEAR 10 A.H., Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, announced that he would visit Makkah to perform Hajj. The news spread in the country and an immense number of Muslims gathered in Medina to accompany him to Makkah. Their numbers are estimated at more than 100,000. Before his departure, he appointed Abu Dujana Ansari as governor of Medina during his own absence. On the 25th of Dhul-Qidah, he left Medina, accompanied by all his wives.

The Muslims observed every move, every act, and every gesture of the Prophet on this occasion, and everything that he did, became a precedent for all time, to be imitated by all Muslims.

Maxime Rodinson

After the fall of Mecca, Muhammad performed (for the second time since his Emigration) the rite of the Umra, the ritual processions around the Kaaba, and the journeys between Safa and Marwa (400 yards apart). But he had not participated in the Hajj… He may have had some idea of depaganizing the Hajj. After the capture of Mecca, in the following Dhu'l-Hijja, Attab, the governor whom Muhammad had installed in Mecca, conducted the ceremony; both Muslims and pagans took part. The following year, Dhu'l-Hijja of the year 9 (March-April 631), Muhammad still hung back from joining the Hajj. He had not yet finalized his teaching on every detail of the pilgrimage and was unwilling to perform the rites in company with pagans. He sent Abu Bakr to preside over the ceremonies. He was overtaken on the way by Ali, who was the bearer of a brand new revelation from on high which it was his business to see implemented. Pagans generally were to take no further part in the

pilgrimage. On the expiry of the sacred truce of four months, all who had not been converted or made a special agreement with Muhammad, would be dealt with as enemies. This was the last year that pagans were permitted to join the Hajj.

One year later, in Dhu'l-Hajj of the year 10 (March 632), the Prophet announced that he would personally conduct the ceremony, now that the temple and shrines were purified of all pagan presence. He reached Mecca on 5 Dhu'l-Hajj (3rd March). On 8 Dhu'l-Hijja, the ceremonies began. All eyes were fixed on the Prophet because his behavior during the rites would become law. (Muhammad)

On the 9th of Dhil-Hajj of 10 A.H., the Prophet gave a historic speech in the plain of Arafat in which he summed up the main points of his teachings. The Prophet first thanked God for His countless mercies and blessings, and then said:

"O Muslims! Listen to me with attention. This may be the last occasion when I am with you, and I may not be alive to perform another Hajj.

God is One and He has no partners. Do not associate anyone or anything with Him. Worship Him, fear Him, obey Him and love Him. Do not miss your mandatory prayers. Observe faithfully the month of fasting. Pay Zakat (poor-tax) regularly, and visit the House of God whenever you can.

Remember that everyone of you is answerable to God for everything you do on this earth, and very soon you will find yourselves in His presence.

I am abolishing all the customs, practices and traditions of the Times of Ignorance. I disclaim the right of retaliation for the blood of my cousin, Ibn Rabi'a; and I disclaim the interest on the loans given by my uncle, Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib.

I call upon you all to show respect to the honor, life and property of each other in the same manner as you show respect to the sanctity of this day. All believers are brothers of each other. If something belongs to any one of them, it is unlawful for others to take it without his permission.

Be sincere in your words and deeds, and be sincere to each other, and remain united at all times.

You have rights in regard to women; so also you have duties toward them. Treat them with love, kindness, respect and affection.

The slaves you own were also created by God. Do not be cruel to them. If they err, forgive them. Give them to eat what you eat and give them to wear the same kind of clothes as you wear.

The members of my family are like the pole-star. They will lead to salvation all those who will obey them and follow them. I leave among you a composite heritage – the Book of God (Qur'an) and the members of my family. Both of them are complementary to each other and are inseparable from each other. If you defer to both of them you will never go astray.

And remember that I am the last of the Messengers of God to mankind. After me there will be no other messenger or messengers of God."

Muhammad Mustafa concluded his speech with another short prayer of thanksgiving to his Creator, and called upon Him to be a Witness that he had discharged his duty, had fulfilled his obligations, and had delivered the message of Islam to his people.

This speech, like all other speeches of the Prophet, is remarkable for its clarity and practical commonsense. He encapsulated in it his teachings so that they would be etched on the hearts and minds of his listeners for all time.

The Prophet had demonstrated to the Muslims how to perform the rites of Hajj, and he had swept away the remnants of paganism.

In his speech, the Prophet also hinted that he had perhaps not much longer to live. It was around this time that the 110th chapter of Qur'an called "Help" (Surah Nasr), was revealed, and which reads as follows:

When comes the help of God, and victory, And thou dost see the people enter God's religion in crowds, Celebrate the praises of thy Lord,

And pray for His Forgiveness: For He is oft-Returning (in grace and mercy)

Imam Bukhari reports that when this chapter was revealed, Umar bin al-Khattab asked Abdullah ibn Abbas if he could enlighten him on its meaning. Ibn Abbas said: "These verses mean that the time for the Messenger of God to part company with us is approaching."

Many latter-day historians of the East and the West have asserted that the death of the Prophet was sudden and unexpected. But his death was neither sudden nor unexpected. In fact, he was himself the first to speak on the subject, and when the chapter called "Help" was revealed, little doubt was left in the minds of the principal companions that his earthly ministry was coming to an end. The intimation of death is in the third verse in which he was called upon to "pray for His forgiveness," and the men of perception were quick to get the message.

Marmaduke Pickthall

It was during that last pilgrimage that the Surah entitled Succour was revealed, which he (Mohammed) received as an announcement of approaching death. (Introduction to the translation of Holy Qur’an, Lahore, Pakistan, 1975)

Chapter 38

The Coronation of Ali ibn Abi Talib as the Future Sovereign of the Muslims and as Head of the Islamic State

The Coronation of Ali ibn Abi Talib as the Future Sovereign of the Muslims and as Head of the Islamic State

The Farewell Pilgrimage was over, and Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, and the vast throng of his followers, were now ready to return to their homes. He gave the signal and the pilgrim caravans began to leave Makkah.

At a short distance in the north of Makkah, there is a plain called Khumm, and in Khumm there was a well or pool of water (Ghadeer). Khumm is at the junction of many roads. When the Prophet arrived in the vicinity of Ghadeer, he received a new – the following revelation from Heaven:

O Apostle! Proclaim the Message which hath been Sent to thee from thy Lord. If thou didst not, Thou wouldst not have fulfilled and proclaimed His Mission. And Allah will defend thee from Men (who mean mischief) for Allah guideth not Those who reject truth. (Chapter 5; verse 70)

The command of Heaven was seldom, if ever, so peremptory, as in this verse, and related, obviously, to some vitally important matter to which the Apostle had to address himself – there and then. He, therefore, ordered his own caravan to halt, and he recalled all those caravans which had either gone ahead or had gone in other directions. He himself waited until the last caravan that left Makkah, also arrived near the well in Khumm.

The pilgrim were going to break up at Khumm into their separate caravans and were going to disperse, each bound for its own destination. The Apostle had a most important announcement to make before the dispersal of the pilgrims, and he was most anxious that the maximum number of Muslims should hear it from him.

A "pulpit" was improvised with the howdahs of the camels, and the Prophet took his position on it so that everyone in the vast multitude could see him with his own eyes. His cousin, Ali, was standing near him.

Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, was now ready to make the historic announcement in compliance with the divine mandate quoted above. He thanked God for the great Blessing of Islam, and for His Grace and His Mercy, and then he posed the following question to the Muslims:

"Do I have or I do not have a greater right on your souls than you yourselves have on them?"

The Muslims answered with one voice: "The Apostle of God has a greater right on our souls than we ourselves have on them." "If that is so," he said, "then I have a very important message to deliver to you," and he put across the message as follows:

"O Muslims! I am a mortal like any of you, and I may soon be summoned into the presence of my Lord. My most precious legacy to you is the Book of Allah and the members of my family, as I have told you before. Now listen to this with attention that I am the Master of all of you - of all Believers. All those men and women who acknowledge me as their Master, I want them to acknowledge (at this point he held Ali's hand and lifted it high over his head) Ali also as their Master. Ali is the Master of all those men and women whose Master I am."

Having delivered this message, Muhammad Mustafa lifted his hands toward the sky, and said:

"O Allah! Be Thou a Friend of him who is a friend of Ali, and be Thou an Enemy of him who is his enemy. Help him whoever helps Ali, and forsake him whoever forsakes him (Ali)."

Foregoing is a summary of what Muhammad, the Messenger of God, said in Khumm. The full text and context of his speech is preserved in the famous book Taudih-ed-Dala'el by the great Sunni doctor, Allama Shahab-ud-Deen Ahmed. Following is a condensation of the speech as recorded in Taudih-ed-Dala'el:

I offer praise and thanks to Allah for all Hisbounties. I bear witness that there is no God but Allah, and He is One, the Almighty, the Perfect. We all depend upon Him. He has no consort, no son, no partner(s) & c. I am one of His slaves but He chose me as His Messenger for the guidance of all mankind. O people! fear Him at all times and never disobey Him. Do not fight but for Islam, and remember that Allah's knowledge encompasses every thing.

O Muslims! beware that when I am gone, there will arise men who will attribute false statements to me and there will be other men who would believe in them. But I seek Allah's protection that I should ever say anything but the Truth and invite you toward anything but what He has revealed to me. Those who transgress in this matter, will pay the penalty.

At this point Ibada ibn Samit, a companion, rose and asked: "O Messenger of Allah! when that time comes, whom should we look up to for guidance?"

The Messenger of Allah answered as follows:

You should follow and obey "the People of my House (Ahlul-Bait)." They are the heirs of my apostolic and prophetic knowledge. They will save you from going astray, and they will lead you to salvation. They would invite you toward the Book (Al-Qur'an al-Majid) and my Sunnah. Follow them because they are never in doubt about anything. Their faith in Allah is unshakable. They are the rightly-guided ones; they are the Imams, and they alone can save you from misbelief, heresy and innovations.

Allah has commanded you to love my Ahlul-Bait. Devotion to them is made mandatory for you (Al-Qur'an al-Majid: Chapter 42, verse 23). They are the ones who are sanctified (Al-Qur'an al-Majid: Chapter 33, verse 33). They are the ones endowed with virtues and excellence which no one else possesses. They are the Chosen ones of Allah Himself.

Now I have been commanded by Allah to make this announcement:

At this point he held Ali's hand, lifted it high, and said:
"Know ye all, of whomsoever I am the Maula (Master), Ali is his Maula (Master). O Allah! Be Thou a Friend of him who is a friend of Ali, and be Thou an Enemy to him who is an enemy to Ali. O Allah! Help him who helps Ali, and abandon him who abandons him."

The speech was over. Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah, had formally and officially declared Ali ibn Abi Talib to be the Sovereign of all Muslims, and had appointed him as the head of the State and Government of Islam.

As soon as this announcement was made, another verse, the last one of Al-Qur’an al-Majid, was revealed to Muhammad. It reads as follows:

This day I have perfected for you, Your Religion and have Completed My Favors on you, and have Chosen for you Islam to be your Religion. (Chapter 5; verse 4)

It was the 18th day of the 12th month of the 10th year of the Islamic calendar (March 21, 632) when the last verse of Revelation was sent down to this earth. The Revelation had begun in A.D. 610 in the cave of Hira in Makkah, and was brought to a conclusion in A.D. 632 in the plain of Khumm with the proclamation that Ali ibn Abi Talib would be the Chief Executive, after Muhammad himself, of the Government of Medina and the State of Islam.

Ibn Hujr Asqalani writes in Isaba that after making this announcement, the Apostle of God placed a turban on the head of Ali ibn Abi Talib, thus completing his coronation.

All the companions congratulated Ali on this glorious occasion when the Apostle of God himself crowned him and proclaimed him his vicegerent and successor. Among those who congratulated him were Umar bin al-Khattab and the wives of the Apostle.

Hassan bin Thabit Ansari was the court poet of the Prophet, and he versified all important events. The coronation of Ali was one of the most

historic events that challenged his poetical talents. He composed a paean on this occasion which he dedicated to Ali. Following is a rough translation of his verses:

On the day of Ghadeer Khumm, the Prophet and the Muslims called them out, and I heard him when he said:

"Who is your Lord, and who is your master?" They all said: "Allah is our Lord, and you are our master, and no one among us can disobey you."

So he asked Ali to stand up. When Ali rose, he held his hand, and said: "I select you as the leader after me. Therefore, whomsoever's master I am, Ali is his master also. Therefore, all of you become his true friends and supporters."

The Prophet then prayed, saying: "O Allah! Be Thou a Friend of those who are the friends of Ali; and be Thou an Enemy of those who are his enemies."

Another poet who composed verses on the occasion of the coronation of Ali, was Qays ibn Ubada Ansari. He said:

When the enemy rebelled against us, I said that our Sustainer, Allah, is sufficient for us, and He is the best Protector that we can have.

Ali is our master and he is the master of all believers. This is borne out by Al-Qur’an al-Majid, and it is so since the day when Allah's Messenger said: "Whomsoever's master I am, Ali is his master also." This was indeed a most remarkable event.

Whatever the Messenger of Allah said on that day, is final; it's the last word, and there is absolutely no room for any argument in it.

Curiously and most incredibly, even a man like Amr bin Aas was "inspired" to dedicate a poem to Ali at Ghadeer-Khumm. Following is a distich of his composition:

The stroke of Ali's sword is just like that oath of allegiance which everyone took on the Ghadeer, and which made everyone bow himself before his (new) authority.

If the two verses of Qur'an relating to Ali's coronation, are read in their chronological order, and in their historical context, their meaning will become clear. I shall quote them once again in a brief analysis; and for the facility of reference, I shall call them the first and the second verse.

(I).O Apostle! Proclaim the Message which hath been Sent to thee from thy Lord. If thou didst not, thou wouldst not have Fulfilled And proclaimed His Mission. And Allah will defend thee from men (who mean mischief). For Allah guideth not those who reject Faith.

(II).This day I have perfected your Religion for you: Completed My favor upon you, and have chosen For you Islam as your Religion.

The coronation of Ali took place within the framework of these two verses of Qur'an. His coronation was such a pressing matter that Muhammad Mustafa, the Recipient of Revelation, was ordered, in the first verse, to suspend whatever he was doing, and to give his immediate attention to it. He, therefore, ordered all pilgrims to assemble in the plain of Khumm, and told them that Ali would rule them as his successor in the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

No sooner Muhammad had done so, than the second verse was revealed as a sign of Heaven's endorsement of his action. The proclamation of Ali as his successor was the consummation and the culmination of the lifework of Muhammad. With this proclamation, his mission as God's Messenger, was accomplished. He had declared Ali to be his successor on many occasions in the past but at Ghadeer-Khumm, he formally inaugurated him as the future Head of the Islamic State.

Between these two verses of Qur'an – one so emphatic in demanding action and the other so unequivocal in its approval of the investiture of Ali as the successor of Muhammad – and the latter's statement: "Ali is the master of all those men and women whose master I am," there is a logical and an obvious correlation.

Some casuists have quibbled over the word Maula as used by the Prophet when he said: Ali is the maula of all those men and women whose maula I am. They concede that the statement is authentic but they interpret the word maula not as "master" but as "friend." But this was not the intent of the Prophet himself. Did he recall all the caravans and order them to gather in the shadeless plain of Khumm merely to tell them that Ali was their friend? Was it assumed by the pilgrims at the time that Ali was not their friend, and the Prophet had to reassure them that he (Ali) was in fact their friend?

Those people who interpret the word maula as "friend," perhaps forget that the Prophet used it in reference to himself before he used it in reference to Ali, and this can admit of only one right interpretation, viz., if Muhammad, the Apostle, is the Master of all Muslims, Ali too is their Master.

The casuists also forget that before proclaiming Ali as his successor and the sovereign of all Muslims, the Prophet asked them the following question:

"Do I have or I do not have a greater right over your souls than you yourselves have on them?"

The answer of the Muslims to this question was an unqualified "yes."

This question was prefatory to the Prophet's announcement that Ali was his successor. The question and the announcement were part of the same context, and if read together, they will leave no doubt in the mind of the reader that the word maula means "Master" and not "friend."

Most of the Sunni commentators have conceded that the command of God to His Messenger in the first verse pertains specifically to the declaration that Ali is the Sovereign of all Muslims. Some of these commentators are:

Wahidi in Asbab-un-Nazool
Suyuti in Tafseer Durr al-Manthoor
Ibn Kathir
Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal
Abu Ishaq Naishapuri
Ghazali in Sirrul-Alameen
Tabari in Tarikh-ar-Rusul wal-Mulook

Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddith of Delhi, India

Here it should also be pointed out that before the revelation of the first verse (5:70), all commandments relating to the Shari'a (the religious code of Islam), such as the daily Prayers, Fasting, Zakat (poor-tax), Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah), and Jihad – in fact all the laws for the personal, social, economic and political life of the Muslims, had already been given to Muhammad. He had promulgated them, and the Muslims were acting upon them, and they had become an integral part of their lives. He had introduced and implemented every law.

The only thing that the Prophet had not done until then, was to formally introduce to his umma, his own successor. The umma had a right to know who would be its ruler after his (the Prophet's) death. This is what he did when he was commanded to "proclaim the message." The commandment of God was most emphatic, and the Prophet could not defer its execution for another moment.

But as soon as the Prophet carried out the heavenly command, with total clarity and absolute finality, the second verse (5:4) was revealed, and it put the seal of approval upon his action.

With the official inauguration of Ali ibn Abi Talib as the successor of Muhammad and as the leader of all Muslims, the last of the revealed verses was written down in the Book of God.

The last verse of the Book of God was revealed and was recorded on March 21, 632, as noted before, and the gate of Revelation was closed forever. Eighty days later, i.e., on June 8, 632, Muhammad Mustafa parted company with his umma, and went into the presence of his Lord. There is no record that he gave his umma any new commandments or prohibitions (Awamir wa Nawahi), doctrinal or practical, during these 80-days. Islam was declared to be complete and perfect as soon as its Prophet appointed Ali ibn Abi Talib his successor.

May God overwhelm His slaves, Muhammad and Ali, and the members of their families, with His Grace, with His Mercy and His Blessings.

Muhammad Mustafa could now look back with satisfaction upon his work, and he could look ahead into the future with new hope,

confidence and cheer. In designating Ali as his successor, he saw continuity of that mission for which he had labored so unsparingly for 23 years, and which had been fraught with so many perils. His mission had demanded countless sacrifices on his part. Now it appeared to him that all his labors and sacrifices had at last borne fruit, since he knew that Ali would steer the vessel of Islam to its destination with the same skill as he himself had done.

Muhammad did not pick out Ali to be his successor merely because he was his cousin, his son-in-law, and his favorite disciple; nor did he pick him out because of his (Ali's) personal qualities. Muhammad had very little to do with this choice. The timing of the revelation of the last two verses of Al-Qur'an al-Majid (5:70 and 5:4), the events that transpired during the interval of these two revelations, and their correlation, lead the observer to but one conclusion, viz., the choice of Ali as the successor of the Prophet of Islam, was made in Heaven. God Himself chose Ali. God could not have chosen the third or the second. He could have chosen only the finest, the best, the unique, such as Ali was. Ali was the symbol and the manifest expression of the Truth of Islam, and he was the first witness of the Truth of its Prophet. May God bless them both and their families.

Mohammed Mustafa, the Messenger of God, availed of every opportunity to call attention of the Muslims to the sublime rank of Ali. In one of his most famous Hadith (statement, tradition), he said that his relationship with Ali was the same as that of his apostolic forerunners – Moses and Aaron – with the difference that Ali was not a prophet.

This Hadith was reported by Saad bin Abi Waqqas, and was recorded by Imam Muslim in his Sahih as follows:

Amir b. Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas reported on the authority of his father that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) addressing Ali said: "You are in the same position with relation to me as Aaron (Harun) was to Moses (Musa) but with (this explicit difference) that there is no prophet after me." Sa'd said: "I had an earnest desire to hear it directly from Sa'd, so I met him and told him what Amir (his son) had narrated to me, whereupon he said: "Yes, I did hear it." I said: "Did you hear it yourself?" Thereupon he placed his fingers upon his ears and said: "Yes, and if not, let both of my ears become deaf."

Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) left Ali b. Abi Talib behind him (as he proceeded) to Tabuk, whereupon he (Ali) said: "Allah's Messenger, are you leaving me behind with women and children?" Thereupon he (the Prophet) said: "Aren't you satisfied with being unto me what Aaron was unto Moses but with this exception that there would be no prophet after me?"

This hadith has been narrated on the authority of Shu'ba with the same chain of transmitters. Amir b. Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas reported on the authority of his father that Muawiya b. Abi Sufyan appointed Sa'd as the governor and said: "What prevents you from cursing Abu Turab (Ali)?" He said: "It is because of three things which I heard Allah's Messenger saying about him that I would not curse him, and if I were to find even one of those three things, it would be dearer to me than red camels. I heard Allah's Messenger say about Ali as he left him (in Medina) when going on a campaign (Tabuk). Ali said to him: 'Allah's Messenger, are you leaving me behind with women and children.?' Thereupon Allah's Messenger said to him: 'Aren't you satisfied with being unto me what Aaron was unto Moses but with this exception that there is no prophethood after me?' And I (also) heard him say on the Day of Khayber: 'I would give this banner to a man who loves Allah and His Messenger, and Allah and His Messenger love him.' He (the narrator) said: We were anxiously waiting for it when he (the Prophet) said: 'Call Ali.' He came and his eyes were inflamed. He applied saliva to his eyes and gave him the banner, and Allah gave him victory.

The third occasion was when the following verse was revealed:

"Let us summon our children and your children."

Allah's Messenger called Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain and said: 'O Allah! They are my family.'"

The Hadith of the Prophet in which he said that Ali was to him what Aaron was to Moses, dovetails with the following verses of Al-Qur'an al-Majid:

(Moses prayed):

"O my Lord! Expand me my breast; Ease my task for me; And remove the impediment from my speech; So they may understand what I say; And give me a minister from my family: Aaron my brother, Add to my strength through him, And make him share my task: That we may

celebrate Thy praise without stint; And remember Thee without stint; For Thou art He that ever regardeth us." (God) said: "Granted is thy prayer, O Moses!" And indeed We conferred a favor on thee another time before." (Chapter 20; verses 25 to 37)

The Prophet Moses prayed to God to give him a Minister from his own family. He did not want a minister from among his companions and friends. He prayed that Aaron, his brother, would be his Minister, and would be a source of strength to him.

God answered the prayer of His Apostle Moses, gave him his own brother, Aaron, as his Minister, and made him a source of strength for him.

Muhammad, the Last Messenger of God, also selected his Minister from his own family. His choice was Ali, his brother. Ali added to his strength, and shared his task with him, just as he had promised to do, many years earlier, at the feast of Dhu'l-'Asheera in Makkah in the assembly of the elders of the clans of Hashim and Muttalib.

(Before this) We sent Moses the Book, and Appointed his brother, Aaron, with him asMinister. (Chapter 21; verse 48)

God Himself appointed Aaron as Minister. It was not the umma (the people) of Moses which appointed his Minister.

We appointed for Moses thirty nights, and completed the period with ten more: Thus was completed the term of communion with his Lord, forty nights. And Moses had charged his brother, Aaron (before he went up): Act for me amongst my people: Do right and follow not the way of those who do mischief. (Chapter 7; verse 142)

Moses put his brother, Aaron, in charge of his umma (people), and he did not abandon it (the umma) without a leader even though he was going away only for forty days.

Muhammad Mustafa (may God bless him and his family) did not deviate from this practice of the apostles and prophets of God. He too did not leave the Muslims leaderless, and appointed his brother, Ali, as their leader and ruler after him.

Moses prayed:

"O my Lord! Forgive me and my brother! Admit us to Thy Mercy! For Thou art the Most Merciful of those who show Mercy." (Chapter 7; verse 151)

Moses did not pray only for himself; he also prayed for his brother, Aaron. Muhammad Mustafa also prayed for both, himself and his brother, Ali. He invoked God's blessings upon both of themselves and their families.

Again We bestowed Our favor on Moses and Aaron. Peace and salutation to Moses and Aaron. Thus indeed do We reward those who do right. For they were two of Our believing servants. (Chapter 37; verses 114, 120, 121, 122)

God bestowed His favor on Moses and Aaron, and He bestowed His favors upon Muhammad and Ali, His believing servants. All four of them did right, and God rewarded them, and sent peace and salutations to them.

Though Aaron was divinely chosen to be the heir andsuccessor of Moses, he died within his lifetime, thus necessitating the selection of a new leader. The new leader was Joshua. Like Aaron, he too, was the divinely commissioned successor of Moses, and the umma had nothing to do with his selection.

After the death of Moses, his successor, Joshua, led the Israelites to victory.

The policy parameters in the matter of selecting and appointing a leader for the Muslim umma, after the death of Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, can clearly be seen in the verses of Qur’an quoted above. Ali ibn Abi Talib was the choice of Heaven. All that Muhammad, had to do, was to make the formal announcement that Ali would be the leader of the Muslims after his own death. It was to make this announcement that he ordered the Muslims to assemble in the plain of Khumm.

A modern Muslim might assume that this historic announcement by the Prophet, must have been followed by universal rejoicing among the Muslims. It seems strange to say that it was not. There were some

Muslims who were happy but there were many others who were not. These latter had entertained other hopes, and had nursed other ambitions, and their hopes and ambitions did not exactly jibe with the proclamation of the Prophet at Ghadeer-Khumm. His proclamation, so forthright and unequivocal, frustrated all their hopes and ambitions.

But they did not give up. They conceived another gambit. They began to whisper in the ears of the Arabs that the designation of Ali as the Sovereign of all Muslims was an act prompted by the desire of the Prophet to monopolize political power in his own family – in the clan of Hashim – to the exclusion of all others, and that it had nothing to do with Revelation. They figured that if their "argument" appealed to the Arabs, then they would be able to push them into a scramble for power in which they themselves might come on top. From that moment, therefore, they began to work at mapping out a new strategy to meet the new situation.

Who were these people? They have not been identified by their names but their existence and their potential for mischief are recognized in the first verse (5:70). The Prophet, apparently, was hesitating to act, being mindful of the massive opposition of many Arabs to the appointment of Ali as the future head of the Islamic State. But he was reassured that God would protect him from them; that he should overcome his hesitation, and should declare the vicegerency of Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Opposition to the historic announcement at Ghadeer-Khumm was opposition to Muhammad himself. Opposition to him, until that announcement, however, was hidden and inconspicuous; but soon it was to rear its sinister head in his own lifetime. This subject has been dealt with in Chapter 39.

The designation, by Muhammad Mustafa, at Ghadeer-Khumm, of Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor, has been reported by the following of his Companions:

Khuzayma bin Thabit
Sehl bin Sa'ad
Adiy bin Hatim
Aqba bin Aamir
Abu Ayyub Ansari

Abul-Haithum bin Taihan
Abdullah bin Thabit
Abu Ya'la Ansari
Nu'man bin Ajlan Ansari
Thabit bin Wadee'a Ansari
Abu Fadhala Ansari
Abdur Rahman bin Abd Rabb
Junaida bin Janada
Zayd bin Arqam
Zayd bin Sherheel
Jabir bin Abdullah
Abdullah bin Abbas
Abu Saeed al-Khudri
Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari
Salman el-Farsi
Jubayr bin Mutim
Hudhayfa bin Yaman
Hudhayfa bin Usayd

Among the historians who have recorded the events of Ghadeer-Khumm are Atheer-ud-Deen in his book Usudul-Ghaba; Halabi in his Seera-tul-Halabiyya; and Ibn Hajar in his al-Sawa'iq-al-Muhriqa.

The traditionalists who have mentioned the events of GhadeerKhumm are Muslim, Nasai, Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja; Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Hakim.

Chapter 39

Usama's Expedition

Zayd bin Haritha was the freedman and friend of Muhammad Mustafa. He was killed in the battle of Mootah in A.D. 629 in which he had led the Muslims against the Romans. The Muslims had been defeated in that battle, and they had retreated into Hijaz.

The Prophet of Islam wanted to efface the memory of that defeat but he was awaiting an opportune moment for doing so. Ever-since the Prophet, may God bless him and his Ahlul Bait, had migrated to Yathrib (Medina) in 622, he had worked very hard. He had carried a burden of responsibilities that even a syndicate of men would have found excessively heavy. Since the Farewell Pilgrimage in March 632, he had worked almost non-stop. Unremitting labor and lifelong austerity inevitably took their toll, and he fell ill. This illness was going to be fatal. Though he had felt weak even before his illness set in, he had not allowed weakness to interfere with his duties as the Messenger of God and as the Sovereign of the Muslims.

The long-awaited "opportune moment" appears to have arrived at last. The Prophet equipped and organized a new expedition to mount an invasion of the Syrian frontier. The prestige of Islam had been destroyed at the battle of Mootah, and time had come to restore it. To command the expedition, the Prophet chose Usama, a youth of 18, the son of Zayd bin Haritha, the martyr of Mootah. Both father and son had been great favorites of the Prophet. But he did not make them generals because of favoritism; he made them generals because they were qualified by their ability to command other men, and to lead them in war.

On the 18th of Safar of 11 A.H., Muhammad Mustafa placed the banner of Islam in the hands of Usama, briefed him on the aims of the

campaign, and gave him instructions on how he had to conduct it. He then ordered all his companions, with the exception of Ali and other members of Banu Hashim, to report for duty to Usama, and to serve under him. These companions included the oldest, the richest and the most powerful men of Quraysh such as Abu Bakr, Umar, Abdur Rahman bin Auf, Abu Obaida ibn al-Jarrah, Sa'ad bin Abi Waqqas, Talha, Zubayr, Khalid bin al-Walid, and many others. The Prophet ordered Usama to march immediately at the head of the companions and the army toward his destination.

Sir William Muir

On the Wednesday following, Mohammed was seized with a violent headache and fever; but it passed off. The next morning he found himself sufficiently recovered to bind with his own hand upon the Flagstaff a banner for the army. He presented it to Usama with these words: 'Fight thou beneath this banner in the name of the Lord, and for His cause. Thus thou shalt discomfit and slay the people that disbelieveth in the Lord.' The camp was then formed at Jorf; and the whole body of fighting men, not excepting even Abu Bakr and Umar, were summoned to join it. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

The Muslims did not stay long in Madinah following their return from the Farewell Pilgrimage in Makkah. The Prophet had immediately ordered the mobilization of a large army and commanded it to march on al-Sham. He sent along with that army a number of the elders of Islam, the earliest Muhajirun, among whom were Abu Bakr and Umar. He gave the command of the army to Usama ibn Zayd ibn Harithah. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

The Prophet wished the army to leave Medina at once. But strangely, the army did not show any eagerness to obey him. Instead of obedience, the Prophet met resistance – from some of his companions!

Thenceforth, the Prophet had to grapple with two problems; one was to overcome his illness and the other was to overcome the resistance of his army. The last few days of his life on this earth were dominated by this two-pronged struggle.

The senior members of the Quraysh bitterly resented the elevation of a boy of 18 over all of them, and that too, the son, not of a "high-born" Qurayshi, but of a former slave! Therefore, instead of reporting to him for duty, many among them began to play truant and to temporize. Some among them were so disgruntled at the selection of Usama as their general that they openly expressed their displeasure.

R.V.C. Bodley

… The veterans did not like the idea of attacking the still redoubtable Romans with a lad, who had little military experience, as their leader. Mohammed was, however, unmoved by the protests. He was establishing the precedent, observed ever since among Moslems, that age and social standing do not necessarily make the best generals. He was ingraining in them the message of democracy which they were to carry to the world. Without discussing the nomination he summoned Osama to the mosque and handed him the banner of Islam with recommendation to bring it honor. (The Messenger, New York, 1946)

The appointment of Usama as general was not, however, the only reason why some of the companions did not want to go to Syria. There were some other reasons also why they believed it was absolutely essential for them to stay in Medina, regardless of the orders of the Messenger of God. Usama asked the Prophet if it would not be better to defer the invasion of Syria until his recovery from fever. But the Prophet said: "No. I want you to leave this very moment."

Usama went to his camp at Jorf but few of the companions came to report for duty. They knew that the sickness of the Prophet had brought a "crisis" upon the umma (community), and they considered it "unsafe" to leave Medina at a time like this though they considered it quite "safe" to defy his orders. They put the golden rule of "Safety First" ahead of the orders of the Messenger of God.

The Prophet had fever and severe headache but he managed to go into the mosque, and to address the assembly there which included many of the stragglers, thus:

"O Arabs! You are miserable because I have appointed Usama as your general, and you are raising questions if he is qualified to lead you in war. I know you are the same people who had raised the same question about his father. By God, Usama is qualified to be your general just as his father was qualified to be a general. Now obey his orders and go."

Betty Kelen

Soon after the farewell pilgrimage, with his ambition speeding ever northward as if in advance of destiny, Muhammad organized a new expeditionary force to Syria, putting Zayd's son, Usama, in charge of it – against the advice of some of his generals, since Usama was only twenty. Muhammad told them sharply, 'You carp at him as you carped at his father, but he is just as worthy of command as his father was.'

He no longer needed to waste time excusing his actions. He placed his standard in Usama's hands and sent him off to the mustering ground, but the argument rankled in his mind all the same. (Muhammad, Messenger of God)

Whenever the Prophet felt slight relief from his fever and headache, he questioned those present if Usama's army had left for Syria. He kept urging them, 'Send off the army of Usama immediately.'

The rank-and-file of the army obeyed the orders of the Prophet, and reported for duty to their commanding officer at Jorf but most of the senior companions did not. Some among them lingered in the city; others, under constant prodding by the Prophet, went to Jorf but came back. They kept plying between the camp and the city. Some of them came to the city to take items which were missing in the equipment, and some others wanted to hear the news. Still others returned to "enquire after the health of the Prophet." There were also those companions who didn't go to Jorf at all. They stayed in the city out of their "love" for the Prophet since they did not have the "heart" to leave him at a time when he was critically ill.

But these protestations of "love" and "solicitude" for his welfare did not impress the Prophet himself. The touchstone of their love for him was their obedience to his commands. He ordered them to leave for

Syria but they did not. They disobeyed him during the last days of his life.

Betty Kelen

His (the Prophet's) illness worsened, but he tried valiantly to throw it off for Usama's sake, for as word of Muhammad's sickness spread about, the young man was having a hard time recruiting his troops. Some men who had joined him, were returning to Medina, and certainly none were leaving. (Muhammad, Messenger of God)

Eventually, the inevitable took place. Muhammad, the Last Messenger of God on this earth, died. His struggle to send his companions out of Medina, came to an end, with a note of "triumph" for the latter. They did not report for duty to Usama and the army did not go on the campaign – in his lifetime!

For Muslims, every command of Muhammad is the command of God Himself because he is the Interpreter to them, of God's Will and Purpose. Disobedience to Muhammad is disobedience to God Himself. Therefore, those men who disobeyed him, earned the displeasure of God.

The battle of Mootah was fought in A.D. 629, ending in the rout of the Muslims. The Prophet wanted to blot out that stain of defeat. But it was not until three years later – in 632 – that he ordered Usama to invade the Syrian frontier in retaliation for the disaster of Mootah.

The timing of Usama's expedition raises a whole tangle of questions. Why did the Prophet not send his punitive expedition to Syria at any time during the intervening three years? Why did he choose the time just before his own death to send it? Why, all of a sudden, it became so desperately important for him to send his companions and fighting men out of Medina?

As noted before, after the Farewell Pilgrimage, the health of the Prophet had begun to show signs of stress. Two months later, his condition further deteriorated, and some days later, he died.

Also, as noted earlier, the Prophet told the Muslims on more than one occasion that he did not have much longer to live in this world. Tabari,

the historian, has quoted Abdullah ibn Abbas as saying: (About two months after the Farewell Pilgrimage) "The Messenger of God told us that he would perhaps die in a month's time." (History, Vol. II,, page 435).

It is also reported that one night the Prophet went into the cemetery of Al-Baqi, accompanied by a domestic. After praying for the dead, he said to his companion: "They (the dead) are in a better state than those who are alive. Soon many new evils will appear, and each will be more frightful and hideous than its forerunner."

On the one hand the Apostle of God was predicting his own demise, and was also predicting the appearance of new evils and outbreak of new disturbances; and on the other, he was exhorting his Companions to leave Medina and to go to Syria!

In view of the imminence of his own death, what was more important for the Apostle to do: to seek retaliation for the death of a friend who was killed three years earlier on a distant frontier or to protect the State of Medina and the Muslim umma from the new perils which, he said, were soon going to appear?

The obvious answer to this question is that if retaliation for the death of Zayd could wait for three years, it could wait a little longer, and that the security of the State and the safety of the umma, were far more important than anything else. Therefore, the Prophet ought to have deployed the army in and around Medina, instead of sending it abroad.

But it appears that the Apostle himself would not have agreed with such an assessment. He considered nothing more important than to send his companions to Syria out of Arabia itself. When he noticed that they were ignoring his orders, he cursed them. Shahristani, the historian, writes in his book, Kitab al-Milal wan-Nihal (page 8): "The Apostle of God said: 'Usama's army must leave at once. May Allah curse those men who do not go with him.'"

It was the first time in his life that Mohammed Mustafa, the Messenger of Mercy and Mercy for the whole Universe, cursed anyone. Before this, he had never cursed anyone – not even his most rabid enemies like Abu Jahl and Abu Sufyan. He didn't curse the people of Ta'if when they

stoned him and drove him out of their city. Also, in the past, if anyone was unable to go into battle, he did not press him to go, and let him stay at home. But in the matter of Usama's expedition, he did not want to hear any reason or excuse from anyone for his failure to go with it. His orders to the companions to go with the expedition were inexorable, inflexible and emphatic.

In the last moments of his life, a man wishes that all his folks and friends should be around him. He wishes and hopes that after his death, they would take part in his funeral; they would pray for him, and would comfort his family. But contrary to all norms of conduct at a time like this, Muhammad Mustafa was doing all that he could to send his companions and friends away from Medina. He did not want any of them to stay with him. The Sunni Muslims claim that Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, did not appoint his own successor, and he left the matter of choosing a leader for the community to his companions. If they are right in their claim, then the Prophet's order to the companions to leave Medina and to go to Syria, poses a most thorny problem for them.

It was obvious that the Prophet was going to die. He had himself said so repeatedly. The time had come, therefore, for his companions to put their heads together and to determine the new locus of authority. But the Prophet was insisting that they go hundreds of miles away from him – and from Medina. If he had wished them to elect or select his successor through their "mutual consultation," would he have ordered them to quit Medina? Also, he himself had warned the umma that it was threatened by new perils. Would he not, therefore, want his companions to stay in Medina, and defend the umma from those perils? After all, who would defend the umma of Muhammad from those perils if not his own companions?

Since the Prophet knew that he was going to die, he should never have equipped and organized Usama's army. Instead, he should have suggested to his companions that they ought to work out a strategy, through mutual consultation, to avert the new evils and perils which already loomed on the horizons of Medina.

But Muhammad Mustafa did not do this. He, in fact, did just the opposite. He ordered his companions to get out of Medina, and he was never so abrupt with them as he was on this occasion. Could it mean that

it were the companions themselves whom he saw as the authors of the new evils and perils threatening his umma?

Actually, the safety and salvation of the Muslims lay in their unquestioning obedience to the orders of their Prophet. When they disobeyed him, they threw open the door to all evils, disturbances and perils.

In the context of the events of the time, it appears that Muhammad Mustafa had most important reasons for deferring Usama's expedition until the last minute. He had declared clearly, precisely and repeatedly that Ali ibn Abi Talib was going to be his successor. But he was also aware of the presence of a strong undercurrent of the opposition of his companions to Ali.

The Prophet also knew that the group opposed to Ali, was extremely powerful and vigilant. Therefore, he figured that if at his death, members of the group in question, were out of Medina, he (Ali) would succeed him without any incident. The real purpose of the Prophet, in organizing the expedition of Usama, therefore, was to send all those men away from Medina who might challenge Ali in his accession to the throne of the caliphate. He hoped that in the absence of the companions from Medina, Ali would ascend the throne, and upon their return, they would find him firmly in control of the government.

The expedition of Usama, therefore, was the prelude to the transfer of sovereignty from Muhammad to his successor, Ali ibn Abi Talib.

But the companions were not going to leave Medina. To stay in Medina, they dared the Prophet himself, and they even ignored his curses. They knew that if Ali once ascended the throne, then they, i.e., the Companions, would be shut out from the "mansions of power" forever, and they had, for this reason, to prevent Ali's accession to the throne at all costs. They had no intention of being shut out of the "mansions of power."

The following points should be borne in mind by the reader for a reassessment of the episode of Usama's expedition:

1. The battle of Mootah had been fought in A.D. 629. In the summer of A.D. 632, the Syrian frontier was peaceful and quiet, and there was no

threat, real or fancied, of an invasion of Medina from the north. In fact, there were not even any rumors of an attack upon Medina or Hijaz by anyone. And yet, Muhammad Mustafa was showing the greatest anxiety to send his army to Syria.

2. Usama's expedition was organized, apparently, to restore the morale of the Muslims after their rout in the battle of Mootah, and to chastise those people who had killed his father, Zayd bin Haritha. The Apostle charged Usama with the task of exacting retribution from the killers of his father. Now Jaafer ibn Abi Talib, the Winged Martyr of Islam, and the elder brother of Ali, was also killed in the same battle. But the Prophet did not send Ali or any other member of the clan of Hashim with the expedition. He kept them all with him in Medina.

3. Despite his fatal illness, the Prophet was urging the army to march on Syria. He brusquely dismissed the professed solicitude of some of his Companions for his welfare, and ordered them to go with Usama forthwith.

4. Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha was the commanding officer of those companions of the Prophet who were old enough to be his grandfathers such as Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah, Abdur Rahman bin Auf, and many others. The Prophet was thus stressing the principle, just before his death, that the Muslims were not to consider a man worthy of leadership merely because he was old.

5. If a qualified person is available to become a leader, then an unqualified person must not displace him. The companions raised objection to Usama's leadership on this ground. The Prophet agreed that only the most qualified person ought to be invested with supreme authority. But he maintained that Usama was more qualified than all those men who were ordered to serve under him, his extreme youth notwithstanding.

6. The Sunni Muslims say that the Prophet "consulted" his Companions, and this made his government a "democracy." It is true that he "consulted" them occasionally in some minor matters but he himself made all decisions without reference to them. At Hudaybiyya, Umar bin al-Khattab led the opposition to him when he was negotiating terms of peace with the pagans. He ignored the opposition, went ahead and signed a treaty with them. Later, Sunni jurists explained that the Prophet

ignored Umar's protests because he (the Prophet) was acting under the commands of Heaven. They are right. But the appointment of Usama as general of the army had nothing to do with the commands of Heaven and the Prophet was free to rescind his orders when confronted with opposition from the Companions. But he refused even to talk with them on the subject much less to "consult" them in the matter.

7. The Prophet's orders to his Companions to serve under Usama, and to leave Medina for Syria, were most emphatic. But they did not leave Medina, and he died. They, thus, realized their aim which was to be physically present in Medina at his death.

8. Those Companions of the Prophet whom he had ordered to report for duty to Usama – their general – were defying him while he was still alive. If they could disregard his orders and his wishes in his lifetime, they could just as casually, disregard his orders and wishes in the matter of his succession after his death. They put their own ambitions and interests ahead of the commands and wishes of Muhammad Mustafa, the blessed Messenger of God.

Chapter 40

Abu Bakr as Leader in Prayers (s)

The Sunni historians claim that when Muhammad Mustafa was unable to attend the public prayers because of his illness, he ordered Abu Bakr to lead the congregational prayers, and they put this forward as "proof" that he wanted him (Abu Bakr) to become his successor.

There are various versions of this story extant. According to one, Bilal came to ask the Prophet if he would lead the prayer, and he said: "No, tell Abu Bakr to lead the prayer."

There is a second version in which at prayer time, the Prophet asked a certain Abdullah bin Zama'a where was Abu Bakr. Ibn Zama'a went out to call Abu Bakr but could not find him. But he found Umar, and asked him to lead the prayer. But when Umar called the takbir (Allah-o-Akbar), the Prophet heard him, and said: "No! No! Allah and the believers forbid that. Tell Abu Bakr to do so."

As per the third story, the Prophet asked those around him if the time for prayer had come. They said that it had, whereupon he asked them to tell Abu Bakr to lead the congregation. But his wife, Ayesha, said that her father was a very tenderhearted man, and if he saw his (the Prophet's) place in the mosque empty, he (Abu Bakr) would cry, and no one would be able to hear his voice. But he (the Prophet) insisted that Abu Bakr act as the prayer-leader.

There are some other stories also like these in the history books and the substance of them all is that Abu Bakr led the congregation in prayer(s) during the last days of the Prophet on this earth.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

Ibn Shihab said, Abdullah b. Abu Bakr b. Abdur Rahman b. al-Harith b. Hisham told me from his father from Abdullah b. Zama'a b. al-Aswad b. al-Muttalib b. Asad that when the Apostle was seriously ill and I with a number of Muslims was with him, Bilal called him to prayer, and he told us to order someone to preside at prayer. So I went out and there was Umar with the people, but Abu Bakr was not there. I told Umar to get up and lead the prayers, so he did so, and when he shouted Allah Akbar, the Apostle heard his voice, for he had a powerful voice, and he asked where Abu Bakr was, saying twice over, "God and the Muslims forbid that." So I was sent to Abu Bakr and he came after Umar had finished that prayer and presided. Umar asked me what on earth I had done, saying, "When you told me to lead the prayer, I thought that the Apostle had given you orders to that effect; but for that I would not have done so." I replied that he had not ordered me to do so, but when I could not find Abu Bakr I thought that he (Umar) was most worthy of those present to lead the prayer. (The Life of the Messenger of God)

Foregoing is the earliest extant account of the story that Abu Bakr led the prayers. Its narrator was Abdullah b. Zama'a. He himself says that the Apostle ordered him to ask someone which means anyone, to lead the prayer, and he did not specifically mention Abu Bakr. Even later, when the Apostle forbade Umar to lead the prayer, he did not order Abu Bakr to take his place. He merely asked where was Abu Bakr.

Abdullah b. Zama'a thought that Umar was "most worthy" to lead the prayer but the Apostle of God did not agree with him.

Sir William Muir

It is related that on one occasion Abu Bakr happened not to be present when the summons to prayer was sounded by Bilal, and that Umar having received, as he erroneously believed, the command of Mohammed to officiate in his room, stood up in the mosque, and in his powerful voice commenced the Takbir, "Great is the Lord!" preparatory to the service. Mohammed overhearing this from his apartment, called out with energy, "No! No! No! The Lord and the whole body of believers forbid it! None but Abu Bakr! Let no one lead the prayer but only he." (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

As stated above, according to the Sunni historians, the purpose of the Apostle in ordering Abu Bakr to lead the prayers was to "promote" the latter as his successor.

It is entirely possible that Abu Bakr led the Muslims in prayer in the lifetime of the Apostle himself. What, however, is not clear is if he did so at the orders of the Apostle, or, at least with his tacit approval. The claim that Abu Bakr led the prayers at the orders of the Prophet is open to question because he was a subaltern in Usama's army, and the Apostle had ordered him to leave Medina and to report to his Commanding Officer at Jorf which, apparently, he never did.

Even if it is assumed that the Apostle ordered Abu Bakr to act as an Imam (prayer-leader), it is still not clear how it became an "endorsement" of his candidacy for succession. After all, Abu Bakr himself, Umar bin al-Khattab, and Abu Obaida ibn al-Jarrah, all three had served under Amr bin Aas in the campaign of Dhat es-Salasil, and had offered their prayers behind him for many weeks. Amr bin Aas had made it plain to all three of them that he was their boss not only in the army but also as a leader in religious services.

As already noted, the Sunni Muslims assert that the Prophet chose Abu Bakr to lead the public prayers just before his death because he wanted the latter to be his khalifa.

Ibn Hajar Makki, a Sunni historian, says in his book, Tatheer al-Janan (page 40):

"Abu Bakr led Muslims in prayer (at the orders of the Apostle). It is, therefore, the consensus of all scholars that his khilafat was by the fiat of the Apostle."

But the same Sunnis also hold the view that leading other Muslims in prayer does not confer any merit upon the leader himself, and that it is not necessary for a man to be "qualified" to act as an Imam (prayer-leader). In this connection, they quote the following "tradition" of the Prophet of Islam on the authority of Abu Hurayra:

Abu Hurayra reports that the Apostle of God said that:

"Prayer is a mandatory duty for you, and you can offer it behind any Muslim even if he is a fasiq (even if he commits major sins)."

According to this "tradition" a fasiq (sinner) is just as well qualified to be an Imam (prayer-leader) as a saint; in the matter of acting as Imam, the sinner and the saint enjoy parity!

John Alden Williams

And hearing and obeying the Imams and the Commanders of the believers (is necessary) - whoever received the Caliphate, whether he is pious or profligate, whether the people agreed on him and were pleased with him or whether he attacked them with the sword until he became Caliph and was called "Commander of the Believers." Going on a holy war (Jihad) is efficacious with a pious or with a dissolute commander until the day of Resurrection; one does not abandon him. Division of the spoils of war and applying the punishments prescribed by the Law is for the Imams. It is not for anyone to criticize them or contend with them. Handing over the alms-money to them (for distribution) is permissible and efficacious; whoever pays them has fulfilled his obligation whether (the Imam) was pious or dissolute. The collective prayer behind the Imam and those he delegates is valid and complete; both prostrations. Whoever repeats them is an innovator, abandoning the tradition and opposed to the Sunna. There is no virtue in his Friday prayer at all, if he does not believe in praying with the Imams, whoever they are, good or bad; the Sunna is to pray two prostrations with them and consider the matter finished. On that let there be no doubt in your bosom. (Some Essential Hanbali Doctrines from a Credal Statement in Themes of Islamic Civilization, p. 31, 1971).

According to the Hanbali verdict quoted above, anyone and everyone can lead the Muslims in prayer. Abu Hurayra and Abu Sufyan are as much qualified to become prayer-leaders as Abu Bakr.

This opinion was formulated by the later generations of the Muslims. One man who didn't share it with them, was Muhammad Mustafa, the Interpreter of God's Last Message to mankind. He considered Umar bin al-Khattab "unqualified" to lead the Muslims in prayer, and forbade him to do so.

The Shia Muslims discount as spurious the "tradition" which Abu Hurayra has attributed to the Prophet of Islam that it is lawful to offer

prayer behind anyone, even a fasiq. They say that an Imam (a prayer-leader) must be:

A Muslim
A male
An adult
Sane
Just ('Adil)
Knowledgeable
A man of good reputation, i.e., one known to possess good character.

The story that Abu Bakr led Muslims in prayer in the lifetime of the Prophet, is either true or it is false. If it is true, then it means that he carried out a duty which according to Abu Hurayra and the Sunni jurists and scholars, anyone and everyone else was qualified to perform, and it did not make him "special" in any way; if it is false, then it means that he did not lead any prayer-meeting at all when the Prophet was still alive.

But if this report is true, then it also means that any prayer offered behind Umar bin al-Khattab, is void. The Prophet said that God Himself didn't want Umar to act as prayer-leader. Umar's insistence upon leading the Muslims in prayer, before or after the death of the Prophet, could not possibly make those prayers less unacceptable to God!

Chapter 41

The Unwritten Testament of the Messenger of God

Islam was the whole raison d'être of Muhammad Mustafa, the blessed Messenger of God. He was sent into this world to promulgate Islam. To spread the message of Islam, he had to fight against impossible odds but he overcame them. He made Islam viable by dint of the supreme sacrifices which he made for it. Islam's framework and its value-system were to him like a garden which he had nurtured with the blood of his own loved ones.

What can be more logical than to assume that Muhammad would wish to take steps which would guarantee the security and survival of Islam for all time? What could be more natural for him than to wish to see Islam become invulnerable?. He, therefore, thought of safeguarding the future interests of Islam, as far as it was in his power to do so, by writing his will and testament.

Can a Muslim imagine that Muhammad Mustafa could neglect such an important duty as writing a will for his umma? A will, a testament of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, stating with clarity, precision and finality, his orders regarding the transfer of sovereignty to his successor, was the absolute sine qua non of the consolidation of Islam. Therefore, just before his death, he ordered those companions who were around him to bring pen, paper and ink to him so that he might dictate a manifesto for the umma which would protect it from going astray, and would prevent it from splintering.

It was a most reasonable request of a man who was on his deathbed, and who could die any moment.

But he met defiance!

There was a group of his companions which did not want him to write his will.

Imam Bukhari writes in Volume I of his Sahih: Umar said, 'The Messenger of God is overcome by pain. We do not need any testament. We already have the Book of God, and that is enough for us.'(page 25)

Bukhari has recorded the same incident in Volume II of the Sahih in the following words:

"The Messenger of God said: 'Bring a piece of paper. I will write something on it for you which will prevent you from going astray.' But the people who were present, began to argue among themselves. Some of them said that the Messenger of God was talking in delirium." (p. 121)

Here Bukhari has made an attempt to conceal Umar's identity behind the screen of the words some of them.

But Shaikh Shihab-ud-Deen Khaffaji, a Sunni historian, is less coy in this matter, and says:

"Umar said: 'The Messenger of God is talking nonsense.'" (Nasim-ur-Riyadh, Volume IV, page 278)

For a Muslim to insinuate that the Last and the Greatest Messenger of God was "talking nonsense" was a most wanton and reckless statement. Is it at all possible that the Bringer and the Interpreter of God's Last Message to mankind, could become a "nonsense-talker?" And yet, what was so unreasonable or irrational or reprehensible in his request to let him write his will?

Umar's gratuitous remarks led to an argument among those companions who were present in the chamber of the Prophet. A few of them said that they ought to obey their Master, and bring pen, paper and ink to him. But the others who were in majority, supported Umar and withheld the writing implements from him. The argument became so raucous that the Prophet had to order them to get out of his room, and to leave him alone.

Bukhari further writes in his Sahih:

"When the sickness of the Apostle took a serious turn, he said, 'Bring paper so that I may indite for you a will that would prevent you from

going astray after my death.' Umar bin al-Khattab said, 'No. This is meaningless talk. The Book of God is sufficient for us.' Another man said: 'We must bring paper,' until there was an argument, and the Apostle said: 'Get out of here.'"

The defiance of the Messenger of God by Umar had polarized the former's entourage into two groups. It was precisely from this moment that schism reared its head in the Muslim umma.

It was probably the last time when Muhammad, the Messenger of God and the Sovereign of Muslims, had expressed any wish before his companions. But they defied him. He was shocked but perhaps he was not surprised at their defiance. It was not the first time that they had defied him. Usama's expedition had unmasked them.

Sir William Muir

About this time, recognizing Umar, and some other chief men in the room, he (Mohammed) called out: 'Fetch me hither ink and paper, so that I may record for you a writing which shall hinder you from going astray for ever.' Umar said, 'He wandreth in his mind. Is not the Coran sufficient for us?' (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

While under a strong attack of fever and surrounded by visitors, Muhammad asked that pen and ink and paper be brought. He said he would dictate something for his followers' benefit, assuring them that if they adhered to it, they would never go astray. Some of the people present thought that since the Prophet - May God's peace and blessings be upon him - was severely ill and since the Muslims already had the Quran, no further writing was necessary. It is related that that thought belonged to Umar. The people present disagreed among themselves, some wishing to bring writing materials and take down what the Prophet would dictate, and others thinking that any further writing besides that of the Book of God would be superfluous. Muhammad asked them to leave, saying, ‘You must not disagree in my presence.' Ibn Abbas feared that Muslims might lose something important if they did not bring the writing materials but Umar held firmly to his decision which he based upon God's Own words in His Book: "In this scripture, We have left out nothing." (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

In an article captioned Iqbal and Islamic Polity, published in the April 1964 issue of the monthly magazine, Muslim News International, of Karachi, Pakistan, the writer, Jamilud-Din Ahmad, says:

"… The question which confronts the Muslim countries is, whether the law of Islam is capable of evolution - a question which will require great intellectual effort and is sure to be answered in the affirmative; provided the world of Islam approaches it in the spirit of Umar - the first critical and independent mind in Islam, who, at the last moments of the Prophet, had the moral courage to utter these remarkable words: 'The Book of God is sufficient for us.'"

The writer quoted above apparently is very proud of the "moral courage" of Umar.

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, was on his deathbed, and perhaps did not have many hours to live. It was this time that Umar chose to demonstrate his moral courage. At Hudaybiyya, Muhammad Mustafa had ordered him to carry a message to the Quraysh in Makkah but he refused to go on the plea that since there was no one in that city to protect him, they would kill him.Also, when the Treaty of Hudaybiyya was signed, Umar was led, by his "love" of Islam to defy the Apostle of God, and now when the latter was dying, the same "love" asserted itself once again, and forced him to prevent him (the Apostle) from dictating anything that would "impair the authority of the Book of God."

If Umar was prompted to disobey Muhammad Mustafa for this reason, then it means that he (Umar) believed that he (Muhammad) was going to challenge the authority of Qur'an. But how did Umar know that Muhammad would challenge the authority of Qur'an? If the latter had dictated the will, its first few words would have shown, beyond any doubt, if he was, in the words of Umar, "wandering in his mind" and was "talking nonsense."

Perhaps it did not occur to Jamilud-Din Ahmad that Umar was pitting his "critical and independent mind" against the authority of Al-Qur'an al-Majid which says:

It is prescribed, when death approaches any of you, if he leaves any goods, that he make a bequest to parents and next of kin, according to reasonable usage; this is due from the God-fearing. (Chapter 2; verse 180)

But it is possible that Umar was prompted to disobey the Apostle not by his fear that the latter would, in the last moments of his life, undo the work he had done in a lifetime, by overriding the authority of Qur'an; but by his presumption that he (the Apostle) would put into writing what he had said earlier at Ghadeer-Khumm before the multitude of the pilgrims, designating Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor. Umar had to block him regardless of cost. A testament bearing the seal and signature of the Prophet, designating Ali as the future head of the State of Islam would be a document that would put caliphate beyond the reach of all other candidates for it.

The Prophet had no illusions about the intentions of his principal companions vis-à-vis Ali's succession as the supreme head of the dominion of Islam. As he grew noticeably weaker, they grew noticeably bolder in defying him. The expedition of Usama was still hanging fire. In sheer exasperation, the Prophet invoked the curse of God upon those men who did not report for duty to Usama but they did not budge. And they were just as unfazed when he ordered them out of his chamber.

A modern Muslim may find it incredible that any companion of the Prophet of Islam would attribute his commands to "delirium." But there is a Qur'anic parallel for such conduct. It appears that those companions of Muhammad, the Prophet of the Arabs, who said that he was "wandering in his mind," had their own forerunners in the brothers of Joseph, the Prophet of the Israelites. The brothers of Joseph said that Jacob, their father who was also a prophet, was "wandering in his mind." They thought that they were the "smart" ones which he was not. Qur'an has quoted them as follows:

They said: "truly Joseph and his brother are loved more by our father than we: But we are a goodly body! really our father is obviously wandering (in his mind) Slay ye Joseph or cast him out to some (unknown) land, that so the favor of your father may be given to you alone (there will be time enough) for you to be righteous after that." (Chapter 12; verses 8 and 9)

Translator's Note

The ten brothers not only envied and hated their innocent younger brothers Joseph and Benjamin. They despised and dishonored their father as an ignorant fool - in his dotage. In reality Jacob had the wisdom to see that his younger and innocent sons wanted protection and to perceive Joseph's spiritual greatness. But his wisdom, to them, was folly or madness or imbecility, because it touched their self-love, as truth often does. And they relied on the brute strength of numbers – the ten hefty brethren against old Jacob, the lad Joseph, and the boy Benjamin. (A. Yusuf Ali)

Explaining the last line of the second verse, quoted above, the commentator further says:

They (the brethren of Joseph) say in irony, "Let us first get rid of Joseph. It will be time enough then to pretend to be 'good' like him, or to repent of our crime after we have had all its benefits in material things."

Here a student of history might pose the question: Why didn't Muhammad dictate his will later, after the initial failure; surely, there were occasions when the companions gathered again to see him, and he could have dictated his will to them.

We can assume that Muhammad could have dictated his will at a later time but what was there to prevent Umar and his supporters from claiming that it was dictated in a state of "delirium," and was "nonsensical," and was, therefore, not acceptable to the umma. Muhammad had not heard anything more ugly since the times of Abu Jahl, and was not very anxious to hear it again, especially when he was on his deathbed. He, therefore, abandoned the idea.

Umar's ploy would have worked even if Muhammad had dictated the will. To rationalize Umar's conduct, his apologists say that religion had been completed and perfected, and a will, therefore, was not necessary. It is true that religion was now complete and perfect but it didn't mean that the umma was perfect, and that it could dispense with guidance since it was in no danger of deviating from the course of Truth. The umma could deviate from rectitude and it did. All the civil wars, dissension's and schisms in Islam, were caused by this deviation.

For the umma to assert that such a will was not necessary, is to arrogate too much authority to itself. It ought to leave this matter to the judgment of the man whom God selected to be His Messenger to mankind. He alone knew if a will was necessary or not. What right the umma has to restrict the freedom of action of the Representative of God on this earth?

Umar's defiance of Muhammad, when the latter was already at the door of death, is one of the most hideous scenes in the history of Islam, and no amount of window-dressing by historians can finesse it away. The same scene was also the prelude to sustained confrontation between the companions and the members of his (the Prophet's) family.

Chapter 42

The Wives of the Muhammad the Apostle of God

The first wife of Muhammad was Khadija. They were married in Makkah and they spent a quarter of a century of love and happiness together – until her death. While Khadija was alive, Muhammad did not marry any other woman.

After the death of Khadija, Muhammad married many other women but no one among them could ever take the same place in his heart that she had. When she died, the bliss for him, of married life, also departed with her. To the end of his life, he reminisced about her, and remembered her with love, affection and gratitude.

The first woman Muhammad married after the death of Khadija, was Sawdah bint Zama'a, a widow whose husband had died in Abyssinia.

The third wife of the Apostle was Ayesha, the daughter of Abu Bakr. She is said to have been married in Makkah but she went to the house of her husband in Medina.

The Apostle often tried to win the loyalty of a clan or tribe by marrying one of its women. His marriage with Umm Habiba the daughter of Abu Sufyan, and Safiya the daughter of Akhtab, were such marriages.

One of the wives of the Apostle was Hafsa the daughter of Umar bin al-Khattab. Her husband was killed in the battle of Badr, and her father was anxious to find a new husband for her. He offered her in marriage to his bosom friends, first to Uthman b. Affan, and then to Abu Bakr. But both of them regretted their inability to marry her.

Umar was mortified at the rejection of his daughter even by his own friends, and he complained to the Apostle about it. The latter, to salve Umar's injured feelings, said that since no one else wanted his daughter, he would take her into his own harem.

With the exception of Khadija, all other wives of the Apostle remained childless. The governor of Egypt had sent to him a Coptic slave-girl called Maria. She entered his harem, and bore him a son whom he called Ibrahim.

The birth of a son invested Maria with extraordinary importance, to the great chagrin and heart-burning of her co-wives. The Apostle lavished immense love upon the little boy, and spent long hours with him, carrying him in his arms. But unfortunately, the boy didn't live long, and died in the year of his birth.

D. S. Margoliouth

His (Mohammed's) last years were brightened for a time by the birth of a son to his Coptic concubine (sic) Mary whom he acknowledged as his own, and whom he called after the mythical (sic) founder of his religion, Ibrahim. This concubine (sic) having been the object of extreme envy of his many childless wives, the auspicious event occasioned them the most painful heartburning; which indeed was speedily allayed by the death of the child (who lived only eleven months). (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

By giving birth to a child, the status of Maria was raised in the Prophet's esteem; he now looked upon her as a free wife, indeed, as one enjoying a most favored position.

It was natural that this change would incite no little jealousy among his other wives who were barren. It was also natural that the Prophet's esteem and affection for the new born child and his mother increased that jealousy. Moreover, Muhammad had liberally rewarded Salma, the wife of Abu Rafi, for her role as midwife. He celebrated the birth by giving away a measure of grain to all the destitutes of Madinah. He assigned the newborn to the care of Umm Sayf, a wet nurse, who owned

seven goats whose milk she was to put at the disposal of the newborn. Every day Muhammad visited the house of Maria in order to see his son's bright face and to reassure himself of the infant's continued health and growth. All this incited the strongest jealousy among the barren wives. The question was, how long would these wives be able to bear the constant torture.

One day, with the pride characteristic of new fathers, the Prophet entered Ayesha's chamber with the child in his arms, to show him to her. He pointed out to her his great resemblance to his son. Ayesha looked at the baby and said that she saw no resemblance at all. When the Prophet said how the child was growing, Ayesha responded waspishly that any child given the amount of milk which he was getting would grow just as big and strong as he. In fact, the birth of Ibrahim brought so much pain to the wives of the Prophet that some of them would go beyond these and similar bitter answers. It reached a point that Revelation itself had to voice a special condemnation. Undoubtedly, the whole affair left its imprint on the life of the Prophet as well as on the history of Islam. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

On one occasion, Hafsa is reported to have "surprised" her husband with Maria, and she disclosed this "secret" to Ayesha. The other wives of Muhammad heard the story from Ayesha. There was much gossip and loose talk about this incident. Eventually, Al-Qur'an al-Majid had to intervene with a reprimand to the two ladies in the following verse:

If ye two turn in repentance to Him (to God), your hearts are indeed so inclined; but if ye back up each other against Him, truly God is his protector, and Gabriel, and (every) righteous one among those who believe, – and furthermore, the Angels – will back him up. (Chapter 66; verse 4)

Translator's Note

"The Prophet's household was not like other households. The Consorts of Purity were expected to hold a higher standard in behavior and reticence than ordinary women, as they had higher work to perform. But they were human beings after all, and were subject to the weaknesses of their sex, and they sometimes failed."

"The imprudence of Aisha once caused serious difficulties: the holy Prophet's mind was sore distressed, and he renounced the society of his wives for sometime. Umar's daughter, Hafsa, was also sometimes apt to presume on her position, and when the two combined in secret counsel, and discussed matters and disclosed secrets to each other, they caused much sorrow to the holy Prophet." (A. Yusuf Ali)

Many of the commentators and translators of Qur'an have translated the Arabic word saghat which occurs in verse 4 of Chapter 66, quoted above, as "inclined." Their translation reads as follows:

Your hearts have become inclined.

Inclined to what? "Your hearts have become inclined," is a meaningless translation in this context. The correct translation of the word saghat is "deviated." M. Abul Ala Maudoodi has given a correct translation of this verse which is as follows:

"If you both (women) repent to God, (it is better for you), for your hearts have swerved from the right path, and if you supported each other against the Prophet, you should know that God is his Protector, and after Him Gabriel and the righteous believers and the angels are his companions and helpers … " (Tafheem-ul-Qur'an, Volume 6, Lahore, Pakistan, English translation by Muhammad Akbar Muradpuri and Abdul Aziz Kamal, second edition, May 1987).

When Hafsa "surprised" Muhammad in the company of Maria, he is supposed to have promised to her (to Hafsa) that he would not see the latter (Maria) again. This, of course, was disallowed. One wife had no right to restrict the freedom of her husband to see his other wives. Such an attempt on the part of one wife would be contrary not only to the laws of Islam but also to the customs of Arabia, both before and after Islam.

Sir William Muir

As in the case of Zeinab, Mohammed produced a message from Heaven which disallowed his promise of separation from Mary, chided Hafsa and Ayesha for their insubordination, and hinted at the possibility of all his wives being divorced for demeanor so disloyal towards

himself. He then withdrew from their society, and for a whole month lived alone with Mary. Omar and Abu Bakr were greatly mortified at the desertion of their daughters for a menial concubine (sic) and grieved at the scandal of the whole proceeding. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

From the foregoing it can be seen that the domestic life of the Prophet, after the death of Khadija, was not marked by any felicity. Many of his wives were jealous women, and the first "casualty" of their jealousy was the tranquillity of his house.

D. S. Margoliouth

The residence of the wives in the Prophet's harem was short, owing to unsuitability of temper; in one or more cases the newcomers were taught by the jealous wives of the Prophet formularies which, uttered by them in ignorance of the meaning, made the Prophet discharge them on the spot. One was discharged for declaring on the death of the infant Ibrahim that had his father been a prophet, he would not have died – a remarkable exercise of the reasoning power. (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

It was a practice of the Apostle, occasionally, to leave his home at night and to visit the cemetery of Baqee to pray for the dead who were buried there. Just before his last illness, he visited the cemetery once again, perhaps for the last time, and stayed there praying for the dead until past midnight. Some historians say that it was on this occasion that he caught a chill, and it was the beginning of his fatal illness. Ayesha is said to have followed him on one of these visits.

D. S. Margoliouth

At dead of night, it is said, the Prophet went out to the cemetery called Al-Baki, and asked forgiveness for the dead who were buried there. This indeed he had done before; Ayesha once followed him like a detective when he started out at night, supposing him to be bent on some amour; but his destination she found was the graveyard. (From the Musnad of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, volume iv, page 221). (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

The women the Prophet married after the death of Khadija, were very different from her (from Khadija) in character and temperament. Khadija had given consistent and unstilted support to her husband in the promulgation of Islam, and she had sacrificed all her immense wealth for this purpose. Her sacrifices had reduced her to a state of great privation but she never complained to her husband about the lack of anything. Her marriage was rich in the blessings of the love and friendship of her husband, and in happiness unlimited.

Muhammad Mustafa himself lived a life of extreme austerity. Even when he was the sovereign of all Arabia, he was still as abstemious as he was in Makkah before his migration to Medina. Ayesha herself says that she had no recollection that her husband ever ate food to his heart's content twice in one day.

When the spoils of war or the state revenues came, the Prophet distributed them among the Muslims. His wives noted that even the poorest women in Medina were thus growing rich but not they. It occurred to them that they ought not to be deprived of the largesse of their husband. After all, they were not accustomed to living such an austere life as he was. They discussed this matter among themselves, and they all agreed that they too ought to have a share in the good and lawful things – same as the other women of Medina.

The wives of the Prophet, thereupon, presented their demands to him. They were unanimous in demanding a larger stipend from him. Two of them, viz., Ayesha and Hafsa, acted as their "spokeswomen." While they were pressing their demands upon him, Abu Bakr and Umar came to see him on some private or public business.

The Prophet sat silent, surrounded by his wives. When Abu Bakr and Umar learned what was afoot, they were very angry, and they sharply reproved their daughters for demanding more money from their husband.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Abu Bakr rose to his daughter Aishah and pulled her hair and so did Umar to his daughter, Hafsah. Both Abu Bakr and Umar said to their daughters: "Do you dare ask the Prophet of God what he cannot afford

to give?" They answered: "No, by God, we do not ask him any such thing." (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Eventually the matter was resolved when a new verse was revealed in this regard, and which reads as follows:

O Prophet! Say to thy consorts "If it be that ye desire the life of this world, and its glitter, – then come! I will provide for your sustenance and set you free in a handsome manner. But if ye seek God and His Apostle, and the home of the hereafter, verily God has prepared for the well-doers amongst you a great reward." (Chapter 33; verses 28 and 29)
Translator's Note

"The position of the wives of the Prophet was not like that of ordinary wives. They had special duties and responsibilities… all the consorts in their high position had to work and assist as mothers of the ummat. Theirs were not idle lives, like those of odalisques, either for their own pleasure or the pleasure of their husband. They are told here that they had no place in the sacred Household (of the Prophet) if they merely wished for ease and worldly glitter. If such were the case, they could be divorced and amply provided for. (A. Yusuf Ali).

Al-Qur'an al-Majid offered the wives of the Prophet a choice, viz., either they had to choose God and His Messenger, and live lives of self-denial and sacrifice; or they could choose the luxuries, pleasures and glitter of this world in which case they would have to part company with their husband for ever. The offer was unequivocal, and the wives were free to choose.

Ayesha, Hafsa and seven other ladies reconsidered the matter, and then decided to forego the comforts and pleasures of this world, and to stay in the household of the Prophet as his wives.

When Mohammed Mustafa (may God bless him and his Ahlul Bait) died in 632, he had nine wives in his harem. Ayesha outlived him by half a century, and the wife who outlived all other wives of the Prophet, was Maymuna. She, incidentally, was the last woman he had married.

Chapter 43

The Death of Muhammad, the Messenger of God

The aims of the life of Muhammad Mustafa, as the Last Messenger of God on this earth, were:

to destroy idolatry and polytheism;
to proclaim the absolute Oneness of the Creator;
to deliver the Creator's Message to mankind;
to complete the system of religion and law;
to purify the souls of men and women;
to eradicate injustice, iniquity and ignorance;
to establish a system of peace with justice;
to create an apparatus in the form of a political state for the realization of all the foregoing aims, and one which would also maintain the momentum of his work.

Within the 23-years of his ministry as God's Messenger, Muhammad had achieved all these aims, and then it began to look as if like all other mortals, he too had to depart from this world. As noted before, he received this intimation for the first time when Surah Nasr (Help), the 110th chapter of Al-Qur'an al-Majid, quoted earlier in this book, was revealed to him.

Muhammad Mustafa had spent his whole life in prayer and devotions but after the revelation of Nasr, his absorption in worshipping his Creator became much greater than before, in preparation to meet Him.

The Prophet himself hinted, at least on the following two occasions that his death was not too distant from him:

1. In his address of the Farewell Pilgrimage in Arafat on Friday, the 9th of Dhil-Hajj, 10 A..H., he said: "Perhaps, this is my last Hajj." In concluding his speech, he posed a question to the pilgrims, viz., "When you are questioned by your Lord about my work, what will be your answer?" The pilgrims shouted with one voice: "You delivered the message of God to us, and you performed your duty." When he heard this answer, he lifted his gaze toward Heaven, and said: "O God! Be Thou a Witness that I have done my duty."

2. At the "coronation" of Ali ibn Abi Talib at Ghadeer-Khumm, on 18th of Dhil-Hajj, 10 A.H., Muhammad, the Messenger of God, referred once again to his impending death by stating: "I am also a mortal, and I may be summoned into the presence of my Lord any moment."

Tens of thousands of Muslims heard these declarations of their Prophet, and they all knew that he would not be with them much longer. He himself knew that he had accomplished the mission with which his Lord had entrusted him, and he was, therefore, eager to meet Him.

The Prophet spent his nights with his various wives by turns. On the 19th of Safar of 11 A.H., it was his turn to sleep in the chamber of Ayesha. At night, he paid a visit to the cemetery of Al-Baqi in the company of his servant, Abu Muwayhibah, who later reported that:

"The Apostle stood between the graves and addressed them in the following words: 'Peace be upon you who are in these graves. Blessed are you in your present state to which you have emerged from the state in which the people live on earth. Subversive attacks are falling one after another like waves of darkness, each worse than the previous ones.'"

Muhammad Husayn Haykal says that the (fatal) sickness of the Prophet began on the morning following the night on which he had visited the cemetery, i.e., on 20th of Safar. He further says:

It was then that the people became concerned and the army of Usamah did not move. True, the report of Abu Muwayhibah is doubted by many historians who believe that Muhammad's sickness could not have been the only reason that prevented the army from marching to al-Sham, that another cause was the disappointment of many, including a number of

senior Muhajireen and Ansar, in regard to the leadership of the army. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

The following incident appears to have taken place on the morning of the 20th of Safar:

Sir William Muir

One night the Prophet walked to the burial ground in the outskirts of the city. There he waited long absorbed in meditation and praying for the dead. In the morning, passing by the door of Ayesha, who was suffering from a severe headache, he heard her moaning: my head! oh, my head! He entered and said: "Nay, Ayesha, it is rather I that have need to cry my head, my head!" Then in a tender strain: "But wouldst thou not desire to be taken whilst I am yet alive; so that I might pray over thee, and wrapping thee, Ayesha, in thy winding sheet, thus commit thee to the grave?"

"That happen to another," exclaimed Ayesha, "and not to me!" archly adding: "Ah, that is what thou art desirous of! Truly, I can fancy thee, after having done all this and buried me, return straightway to my house, and spend that very evening in sporting in my place with another wife!"

The Prophet smiled at Ayesha's raillery, but his sickness pressed on him too heavily to admit of a rejoinder in the same strain. (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

Betty Kelen

He (the Prophet) prayed the night through (in the cemetery of Al-Baqi) and returned to his home, entering the hut of Ayesha, who had a headache, and upon seeing him she screwed up her face and said, "Oh, my head!"

"No, Ayesha," said the Prophet, "it is oh, my head!" He sat down heavily, his head pounding, pain squeezing his vitals. Presently he said: "Does it distress you to think of yourself dying before me, so that I should have to wrap you in a shroud and bury you?"

He was looking deathly ill, but Ayesha, who believed that he had by no means come to the end of his course of diplomatic marriages, gave him a sour reply: "No. Because I can also think of you coming straight back from the cemetery to spend a bridal night." (Muhammad, the Messenger of God)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

On the following morning, Muhammad found Ayesha, his wife, complaining of a headache, and holding her head between her hands, murmuring, "O my head!" Having a headache himself, Muhammad answered, "But rather, O Ayesha, it's my head!" However, the pain was not so severe as to put him to bed, to stop his daily work, or to prevent him from talking to his wives and even joking with them. As Ayesha continued to complain about her head, Muhammad said to her: "It wouldn't be too bad after all, O Ayesha, if you were to die before me. For I would then pray for you and attend your funeral." But this only aroused the ire of the youthful Ayesha, who answered: "Let that be the good fate of some else and not me. If that happens to me, you will have your other wives to keep you company." (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

The Prophet made no response to Ayesha's jibe, and reclined against the wall. When the pain subsided, he got up and visited his other wives as he had always done. On the 24th of Safar, he was in the chamber of his wife, Maymuna, when he had a sudden attack of severe headache and fever. It is said that he called all his wives and asked them to attend to him in the chamber of Ayesha. They agreed to do so.

The Apostle was too weary to walk himself. Therefore, Ali supported him on one side, and Abbas, his uncle, on the other, and they escorted him from Maymuna's apartment to Ayesha's chamber. He stayed in Ayesha's chamber until his death a few days later.

But notwithstanding his fever and weakness, the Apostle went into the mosque as often as he could, and led the Muslims in prayer. On the 26th of Safar, he is said to have felt slightly better, and went into the mosque supported by Ali and Abbas. He led the zuhr (midday) prayer, and after the prayer, addressed the congregation.

This was the last speech of the Prophet of Islam, and in it he made one more veiled reference to his approaching death. Sunni historians say that Abu Bakr who was present in the audience, understood what the Prophet said, and he began to cry as he was very tender-hearted. The Prophet saw him crying and tried to comfort him, and then turning to the congregation, said:

"I am more grateful to Abu Bakr than to anyone else for his material and moral support, and for his companionship. If in this umma, I were ever to choose any man for a friend, I would have chosen him. But it is not necessary because the Islamic brotherhood is a stronger bond than any other, and it is enough for all of us. And remember that all doors which open into the mosque, should be closed except the door of the chamber of Abu Bakr."

The Prophet warned the Muslims not to relapse into idolatry, and to remember that they were monotheists, and he added:

"One thing you must never do, is to worship my grave. Those nations of the past which worshipped the graves of their prophets, earned the wrath of the Lord, and were destroyed. Beware, lest you imitate them."

Earlier in the day, it was reported to the Prophet that the Ansar were extremely sad because of his illness. It was, therefore, an opportune moment to tell the Muhajireen about the Ansar and their great services to Islam. He said:

"Do not ever for a moment forget what the Ansar have done for you. They gave you shelter and sanctuary. They shared their homes and their bread with you. Though they were not rich, they put your needs ahead of their own needs. They are my 'legacy' to you. Other people will grow in number but they will only diminish. Whatever were the obligations of the Ansar, they have faithfully fulfilled them, and now it is your turn to fulfill your obligations toward them."

The Ansar were also present in the mosque, and they were trying to stifle their sobs. Addressing them, the Prophet said:

"O Ansar! After my death you will be confronted with many sorrows and troubles."

They asked him: "Messenger of God! what is your advice to us? How should we conduct ourselves when those bad times come?"

He said: "Do not abandon your forbearance, and keep your trust in God at all times."

The Syrian expedition was still immobile. The Prophet denounced his companions for their laxity in reporting for duty to their general, and ordered them once again to leave the city there and then. He paused for a few moments, and then invoked the curse of God upon all those men who would disobey his orders to go to Syria.

The speech was over. The Prophet descended from the pulpit and returned to his apartment. He felt faint from the effort to speak, and did not go into the mosque again. It was the last time he was seen in public.

The first part of this speech which relates to Abu Bakr, appears to be spurious, and appears to have been interpolated. As already pointed out, Abu Bakr was under orders to join Usama's army but it is possible that the Apostle condoned his failure to report for duty. The Apostle may also have acknowledged his material contributions to Islam. He had emancipated many slaves in Makkah, and had given his whole property to equip the Tabuk expedition.

The story that the Apostle ordered all doors in the mosque closed except the door of the chamber of Abu Bakr, is also a palpable concoction. Abu Bakr lived in a suburb of Medina called Sunh. He did not live in the city, and he did not have a chamber the door of which opened into the mosque.

The Apostle also said in his speech that if he were to choose anyone for a friend, he would choose Abu Bakr.

If this speech as reported, is authentic, then it means that the Apostle declared publicly that he did not want to make Abu Bakr a friend. If his statement is paraphrased, it would read: "If I were to choose a friend, I would choose Abu Bakr. But I am not choosing him. All of us are members of the universal brotherhood of Islam, and that's enough for all of us."

After all, what was there to prevent Muhammad Mustafa from choosing Abu Bakr as a friend? Nothing! Archangel Gabriel did not come from heaven to tell him not to make Abu Bakr a friend, nor did any one on this earth threaten to do him any harm if he chose him (Abu Bakr) for a friend.

Since this was the last public appearance of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, and since, according to the Sunni claims, he loved Abu Bakr very much, he ought to have availed of the opportunity, not only to declare him a friend but also to declare him his khalifa (successor). If he did, would anyone dare to challenge him? But for some mysterious reason or reasons, he did neither this nor that. (Muhammad neither chose Abu Bakr for a friend nor did he make him his successor). His "love" for Abu Bakr ought to have found some expression, but it did not; a most curious "omission" on his part at a most critical time!

On the 27th of Safar, the Apostle felt too weak to stand and pray. Sunni historians say that it was from this date that he ordered Abu Bakr to lead the Muslims in prayer. He himself, they say, remained seated and went into the motions of prayer.

Bukhari, the collector of Hadith (the traditions of the Prophet), reports the following incident in his Sahih:

"On the 28th of Safar, Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib, came to see Ali, and said: 'By God, Muhammad is soon going to die. I can tell from the expression on the faces of the children of Abdul Muttalib when they are going to die. I, therefore, suggest that you talk with him and ask him about the matter of his succession.' But Ali said: 'No. Not in the state in which he is now. I do not wish to bring up the subject.'"

The Shia historians discount this "tradition." They say that the Prophet had declared, not once, but many time that Ali was his successor and the sovereign of all Muslims. If the Arabs were not going to acknowledge him their lord even after numerous declarations, one more declaration would have hardly made any difference. The Prophet, had, in fact, made an attempt to write his will when he called for pen, paper and ink but he met defiance. And Ali did not want any one to show his "moral courage" by shouting that the Messenger of God was "talking nonsense." Hearing

the gratuitous remark would have only hastened the death of his master from shock.

If this story is true, it only points up Ali's devotion to his master, and his solicitude to shield him from every shock.

The Shia Muslims also say that Abbas himself could have taken up the subject to discuss with the Prophet who was his nephew. The latter was affable, and was accessible even to strangers. What was there for Abbas, therefore, to be leery of?

The companions could see that the Prophet was not going to recover from his fever and headache. Once he was confined to his deathbed, many of them felt that they were "safe" if they disobeyed him. Therefore, no matter what he did to pressure them into going to Syria, they did not, and Usama's expedition never materialized – in his lifetime!

In the afternoon, Muhammad Mustafa summoned Ali, and said to him: "For me it's the journey's end. When I die, you wash my body, cover it in a shroud, and lower it in the grave. I owe money to such and such people, among them a Jew who gave me a loan to equip the expedition of Usama. Pay these debts to all of them including the Jew." He then removed the ring he was wearing, gave it to Ali, and asked him to wear it which he did. He also gave him (Ali) his sword, spear, armor, and other weapons.

Monday, Rabi al-Awwal 1, 11 A. H.

Monday, Rabi al-Awwal 1 of 11 Hijri was the last day of Muhammad ibn Abdullah, the Messenger of God, on this earth. There were moments when he felt slightly better but at other times, he was visibly in great pain. Ayesha, his wife, reports the following:

"As the day crept up toward noon, Fatima Zahra, the daughter of the Messenger of God, came to see him. He welcomed her and asked her to sit beside him. Then he said something to her which I could not hear but she began to weep. Noticing the tears of his daughter, he said something else to her which again I could not hear but she began to smile. She was so much like her father in temperament, character and appearance."

Sometime after the death of the Apostle, Ayesha asked Fatima what was it that her father said to her which first made her weep and then made her smile.

Fatima said: "First my father told me that he was going to die. When I heard this, I began to cry. Then he informed me that I would be the very first to meet him in heaven, and that too, very soon. When I heard this, I was very happy, and I smiled."

Washington Irving

Mohammed's only remaining child, Fatima, the wife of Ali, came presently to see him. Ayesha used to say that she never saw anyone resemble the Prophet more in sweetness of temper than this, his daughter. He treated her always with respectful tenderness. When she came to him, he used to rise up, go towards her, take her by the hand, and kiss it, and would seat her in his own place. Their meeting on this occasion is thus related by Ayesha, in the traditions preserved by Abulfida.

"Welcome my child," said the Prophet, and made her sit beside him. He then whispered something in her ear, at which she wept. Perceiving her affliction, he whispered something more, and her countenance brightened with joy.

"What is the meaning of this?" said I to Fatima. "The Prophet honors thee with a mark of confidence never bestowed upon any of his wives." "I cannot disclose the secret of the Prophet of God," replied Fatima. Nevertheless, after his death, she declared that at first he announced to her his impending death; but seeing her weep, consoled her with the assurance that she would shortly follow him and become a princess in heaven." (The Life of Mohammed)

Toward the afternoon the Apostle had a feeling of great restlessness. He repeatedly moistened his face with cold water from a jug beside him. Seeing him in such pain, Fatima cried: "O my father's distress!" He again tried to comfort her, and said: "After this day, your father will never be in distress again." And he added: "When I die, say, 'We are for Allah, and toward Him is our return.'"

Presently, his breathing became irregular, and he was heard to murmur something. Ibn Saad says in his Tabqaat that the Apostle was saying: "All I seek now is the company of Allah." These were his last words.

Muhammad was heard to repeat these words thrice, and then he fell silent – for ever! Muhammad, the Last Messenger of God on this earth, had died.

Ayesha says: "I placed a pillow under his head, and covered his face with a mantle. Then I stood up with other women, and we all started crying, beating our breasts and heads, and slapping our faces."

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, died on Monday, the first of Rabi al-Awwal of the eleventh year of Hijra in the afternoon. He had lived 63 years less eight days.

The Sunni historians say that the Prophet died, not on the first but on the 12th day of Rabi al-Awwal. The Shia Muslims say that he died, not on the first of Rabi al-Awwal but a day earlier, i.e., on the 28th of Safar.

The consensus of the modern, Western historians, is, that the Prophet died on June 8, 632. The eighth of June, incidentally, is also the day of his birth.

Burial of the Prophet

The body of the Prophet of Islam was washed on Tuesday. Only six men were present at his funeral service. They were:

Ali ibn Abi Talib
Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib
Fadhl ibn Abbas
Qathm ibn Abbas
Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha
Aus bin Khuli Ansari

Usama, the general of the expedition to Syria, was in Jorf, still waiting for the companions. Some of them sent word to him that the Prophet was dying, and that he should return to Medina. He returned, and moments later, his master died.

Ali washed the body of the Prophet as Usama poured water. When the body was washed, Ali draped it in a shroud, and prayed for it. He then went out, and told the Muslims who were in the mosque, to go into the chamber and say the funeral prayers. Banu Hashim were the first to offer prayers, and then the Muhajireen and the Ansar carried out this duty.

In Medina, there were two gravediggers. They were Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah and Abu Talha Zayd bin Sahl. They were summoned but only the latter was available. He came and dug the grave. Ali entered the grave to smooth it out. He then lifted the body from the ground, and gently lowered it into the grave, assisted by his uncle and his cousins. The grave was then covered with earth, and Ali sprinkled water over it.

When Ali and other members of Banu Hashim were busy with the obsequies of the Prophet of Islam, Abu Bakr, Umar, Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah, and some others were busy in Saqifa staking claims to the caliphate. Abu Bakr, it turned out, was the successful candidate. When he had obtained the pledge of allegiance from the Ansar in Saqifa, he and his friends returned to the Mosque of the Prophet. He then ascended the pulpit of the Prophet to take the same pledge from other people. On Monday evening and all day on Tuesday, the people were coming to the mosque to take the oath of allegiance to him. Oath-taking was over late on Tuesday night, and it was only on Wednesday that the newly-elected khalifa found some time to turn his attention to his dead master, and to offer the funeral prayer at his grave.

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, the Sovereign of all Muslims, and the greatest Benefactor of Mankind, did not have a state funeral. A handful of men – his close relatives –had given him burial. Many of those who claimed that they were his companions and friends, had forsaken him in the hour of his death. Their absence from his funeral was the most important nonevent of his obsequies.

Ibn Saad says in his Tabqaat that Ali ibn Abi Talib paid all the debts of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. He sent a crier around town in Medina, and during the Hajj season, he sent a crier to Makka, to declare that he (Ali) would pay all the debts of Muhammad, and that whoever had any claim, could come to him and collect it. He paid the claimants without asking them any questions and without seeking any proof that

Muhammad owed them anything, and this he was doing to the end of his days.

Chapter 44

The Reaction of the Family and the Companions of Muhammad Mustafa to his Death

The Reaction of the Family and the Companions of Muhammad Mustafa to his Death.

THE MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY OF MUHAMMAD MUSTAFA were overwhelmed by a tidal wave of sorrow at his death. His daughter, Fatima Zahra, was the "Light of his eyes." But now those eyes were closed forever; they would not greet her and her children anymore. Nor would she hear from his lips the voice of love and kindness bid her welcome home; they were silenced forever. For her, he was a father, a "mother," a guardian angel, and Mercy of God upon earth. For her, he was the hub of existence itself.

For Muhammad, his daughter, Fatima, and her little family, were the epitome of all his love, his affections, his joys and his happiness. As long as he lived, he had treated her with the greatest respect, and had shown her the deference which is due only to a sovereign. But for him, she was far more than a sovereign. Of all the people he knew, she was the first and the foremost in his heart.

Now Fatima had only one wish – to meet her father in heaven. She realized this wish early – only ten weeks after his death. Her death left her husband and her children to endure not one but two sorrows.

Hasan and Husain were the grandchildren of Muhammad Mustafa. They were his darlings. They sat in his lap when he was in the mosque or at home, and they rode his shoulders when he walked abroad. His lap was their "haven," and his shoulders were their "carriers." Now the "haven" and the "carriers" were lost to them forever. Their eyes, misty

with tears, searched vainly for their loving grandfather everywhere. His pulpit and the alcove of his mosque were now empty, and its somber walls themselves appeared to be in mourning. His mosque was like a shell from which the pearl had gone. The wails and the moans of the two little children bounced back from the walls of his mosque in mournful echoes.

Both children were haunted by a strange, unfamiliar and uncomfortable feeling, and they were gripped by vague and nameless fears. They were too young to define these feelings or to understand these fears; but even they sensed the new feeling of insecurity which assailed them. For the first time in the few years they had lived, they were preyed by insecurity. Their grandfather was, for them, the sign and symbol of security, and now he was gone.

For Ali, the death of Muhammad was the greatest disaster in life. His world had revolved around Muhammad ever since he was born. Muhammad was the center and the circumference of his world. From that world, Muhammad had disappeared, and now Ali did not know how to grapple with it. He felt cut loose from his moorings, and life suddenly appeared to have lost its raison d'être for him.

Ali was the genius of Islam. His character was sublime and his personality incomparable. But he had depended upon Muhammad to act as a catalyst for his genius and personality to burgeon. He had all the potentialities that made him indispensable for Islam but it had taken the magic touch of Muhammad to make them rise to the surface.

And now when he was 32 years old, when he was in the prime of his life, when he was at the zenith of his powers, and when he could give to Islam and to the rest of the world, far more than he had already given, Muhammad died. Muhammad's death was a setback to Ali from which he never recovered the rest of his life.

The reaction of Fatima Zahra, Hasan, Husain and Ali, to the death of Muhammad, was normal and predictable. All five of them made up a family circle, united in their love for, and obedience to God. Muhammad was the "axis" of this little circle. With his death, the "circle" was broken, leaving the other members of the family totally disoriented. Perhaps they did not know at the moment, though they were going to know very

soon, that Muhammad's death only foreshadowed a whole series of new shocks and sorrows for them. Thenceforth, they were going to be in a state of "siege" by sorrow. Each new day was to bring a new shock, and a new sorrow. But through this welter of disaster and tragedy, their faith in the mercy of God, and in the ultimate triumph of justice and truth, remained rocklike, and constant. Their hope of winning the pleasure of God, kept growing ever stronger with each new wave of shock and sorrow.

To withstand the shock of the death of Muhammad, the members of his family, sought and found succor from the One Source that never fails – the unbounded Mercy of God.

The Death of Muhammad Mustafa and his Umma

The Muslims owed Muhammad a dual allegiance; first in his capacity as the Messenger of God; and second, in his capacity as the Sovereign of Arabia. None could withhold his loyalty and obedience to him in either capacity, and still remain a Muslim.

In his character as the Messenger of God, Muhammad had given them deliverance from the indignity of worshipping idols, and he had taught them to worship One God; and in his character as the Sovereign of Arabia, he had given them deliverance from political chaos and ruinous wars. He had given them law and order. He had also given them deliverance from their moral anarchy, economic poverty and cultural barrenness. He had made them rich and civilized, and he had made them an imperial nation. In short, he was their greatest benefactor. The least they could do for him was to give him their loyalty and their love. Loyalty to and love for Muhammad was going to be the touchstone of the faith of the Muslims in his mission – in Islam!

There were those Muslims, most of them from the rank-and-file, who gave Muhammad their love and no one would deny that their love was genuine. When he died, they were stricken with grief; they were heartbroken, and to them the mosque, the city and the whole world looked desolate.

But the reaction of the principal companions of Muhammad to his death, was different.

When Muhammad died, his principal companions did not react to his death. If his death made them sad, they didn't show any sadness. One thing they didn't do, was to offer their condolences to the members of the bereaved family. No one among them came and said to them: "O you members of the House of Muhammad, we share with you your sorrow at his death. His death is a loss not only to you but to all of us."

At a time when commiseration is expected even from strangers, in fact, even from enemies, it's incredible but true that the Companions of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, withheld it from his own family. They left his family to mourn his death alone.

Chapter 45

Muhammad Mustafa and his Succession

As a statesman, Muhammad ranks among the greatest in the whole world. He was endowed with amazing perspicacity, vision and political genius. During the last ten years of his life, he was called upon to make the most momentous decisions in the history of Islam. Those decisions affected not only the Muslims or the Arabs but all mankind. He was also aware that his actions and decisions would affect the actions and decisions of every generation of the Muslims to the end of time itself.

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, therefore, did not make any decision, no matter how trivial, on an ad hoc basis; nor did he make decisions by a "trial and error" method. His decisions were all inspired. They were precedents for the Muslim umma (nation or community) for all time. It was with this knowledge and understanding that he said or did anything and everything.

Muhammad had succeeded, after a long and sanguinary struggle against the idolaters and polytheists of Arabia, in establishing the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth so that his umma (people) may live in it in peace and security, admired and envied by the rest of mankind.

The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth was the lifework of Muhammad. He knew that he was a mortal, and would die some day, but his work, as embodied in the "Kingdom" would live. He knew that after his death, someone else would have to carry on the work begun by him. He also knew that orderly succession is the anchor of stability. He knew all this and much else besides. No Muslim would ever presume to imagine that Muhammad, the Messenger of God, did not know all this better than anyone else.

The succession of Muhammad was also a subject of much speculation among many Muslims. One question that had been uppermost in the minds of many of them, especially since the conquest of Makkah, was, who would succeed him as the new head of the State of Medina, after his death.

This question admits of only one answer, viz., the best Muslim! The successor of Muhammad ought to be, not a second rate person, but the finest product of Islam; someone that Islam itself might uphold with pride as its "masterpiece."

Such a "masterpiece" was Ali ibn Abi Talib. Muhammad had "discovered" him early in life; he had groomed him and designated him as his successor, thus assuring peaceful and orderly transfer of sovereignty. He was most anxious to avert a struggle for power among his companions after his own death.

But, unfortunately, this arrangement did not work out, and the succession, after the death of the Prophet, was not peaceful and orderly. There was a grim struggle for power among his companions in which some new candidates for power succeeded in capturing the government of Medina. Their success signaled an abrupt end of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, and signaled, at the same time, the birth of the Muslim State – a State run by people who were Muslims. The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth or the Islamic State did not survive the death of its Founder.

This demise of the Islamic State, while still in its infancy, may arouse the curiosity of the student of history. He may wonder why it was so short-lived, and how it was possible for these new candidates to subvert the arrangement made by the Prophet himself for a peaceful and orderly transfer of power, and to foist an arrangement of their own upon the Muslim umma.

Following is an attempt to answer this question.

The new candidates for power had not endorsed the arrangement made by the Prophet for transfer of sovereignty. They and their supporters had many reservations about it, and they were resolved to capture the government of Medina for themselves. For this purpose, they had mapped out a grand strategy and they had gone to work at implementing it even before the death of the Prophet.

The principal ploy in the strategy of these candidates for power was to put into circulation the canard that neither the Book of God had expressed any views on the subject of the leadership of the Muslim umma nor the Messenger of God had designated anyone as his successor. They figured that if the Muslims believed such a claim to be true, then they (the Muslims) would assume that the Prophet left the job of finding the future head of his government to the umma itself, and in the umma, of course, everyone was free to enter the "lists" and to grab power for himself, if he could.

Dr. Hamid-ud-Deen

Al-Qur’an al-Majid has not mentioned anything about the manner of selecting a khalifa. The reliable traditions (Hadith) of the Prophet are also silent in this regard. From this, one can make the deduction that the Shari'ah (Holy Law) left this matter to the discretion of the Umma itself so that it may select its leaders according to its own needs, and according to the conditions prevailing at the time. (History of Islam by Dr. Hamid-ud-Deen, M.A. (Honors), Punjab; M.A. (Delhi); Ph.D. {Harvard University, U.S.A.}, published by Ferozesons Limited, Publishers, Karachi, Pakistan, page 188, 4th edition, 4th printing, 1971)

This ploy had a most astonishing success, and it has amazing longevity. It was used then and it is being used today. In the past it was used only in the East; now it is used in both East and West. Few in the East and none in the West have challenged it. Its success is attested by the testimony of the following historians:

Marshall G.S. Hodgson

Qur'an had, typically, provided for no political contingencies on the Prophet's death. (The Venture of Islam, Vol. I, 1974)

Dr. Muhamed Hamidullah

The fact that there have been differences of opinion, at the death of the Prophet, shows that he had not left positive and precise instructions regarding his succession. (Introduction to Islam, Kuwait, 1977)

Francesco Gabrieli

Mohammed died, after a brief illness, on June 8, 632. He did not or he could not make a political testament and he did not designate the one most worthy to succeed him. (The Arabs, A Compact History, New York, 1963)

G.E. Von Grunebaum

The Prophet died on June 8, 632. He had made no provision for a successor. (Classical Islam – A History 600-1258)

John B. Christopher

The most urgent political problem faced by the young Islamic commonwealth was the succession to the leadership of the umma when Mohammed died; this problem was met by the institution of the caliphate. Because Mohammed made no provision for the succession, the stricken Muslim community turned back to tribal precedents of electing a new sheikh as soon as the Prophet died. (The Islamic Tradition, Introduction, New York)

Bernard Lewis

In its origins, the great Islamic institution of the Caliphate was an improvisation. The death of the Prophet, with no succession arranged,

precipitated a crisis in the infant Muslim community. (The Legacy of Islam – Politics and War – 1974)

George Stewart

Reviewing the history, one pauses to wonder how the Caliphate came into being. Mohammed left no will; he nominated no one to follow in his steps, he delegated no spiritual power, and he did not deliver the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to an apostle… (George Stewart in his article, Is the Caliph a Pope? published in the book, The Traditional Near East, edited by Stewart Robinson, published by Prentice-Hall, Inc., N.J., 1966)

Robert Frost once said: "A theory, if you hold it hard enough and long enough, gets rated as a creed." This statement may be modified slightly to read as follows: "A falsehood, if you hold it hard enough and long enough, gets rated as a creed."

An overwhelming majority of the historians of Islam have claimed that the Prophet did not specify anyone as the future head of the State of Medina after his own death. For them, and for many others, this claim has become a creed now.

But not for the Shia Muslims. They maintain that Muhammad, the Messenger of God, declared repeatedly and unequivocally that Ali was his vicegerent and the sovereign of all Muslims.

Muhammad charted a course for his umma, and warned it not to deviate from it after his death. But the umma deviated nevertheless, and this deviation led it, knowingly or unknowingly, into reviving a pagan tradition.

After the death of the Prophet, some of his companions gathered in an outhouse of Medina called Saqifa, and elected Abu Bakr as the leader of the Muslims. There was no precedent in Islam for such an election but there was a precedent for it in the political institutions of the pre-Islamic times.

Three contemporary Pakistani historians write in their History of the Islamic Caliphate as follows:

"After the death of Muhammad (S), the most important and the most complex problem which the Muslims had to face, was that of electing a khalifa. Qur’an is silent on this subject, and the Prophet also did not say anything about it. In pre-Islamic times, the custom of the Arabs was to elect their chiefs by a majority vote. (Unable to find any other precedent) the same principle was adopted in the election of Abu Bakr." (History of the Islamic Caliphate (Urdu), Lahore, Pakistan. Professor M. Iqbal, M.A., L.L.B.; Dr. Peer Muhammad Hasan, M.S., Ph.D.; Professor M. Ikram Butt, M.S).

According to the three historians quoted above, the most important task before the Muslims at the death of their Prophet was to find a leader, since the latter had left them leaderless. Lacking precedent in Islam itself for finding a leader, they were compelled to adopt a pagan tradition, and they elected Abu Bakr as their new leader.

This mode of finding a leader for Muslims was alien to the genius of Islam. It was, therefore, a deviation, as already mentioned. This deviation has been noted by many Orientalists, among them:

R. A. Nicholson

That Mohammed left no son was perhaps of less moment than his neglect or refusal to nominate a successor. The Arabs were unfamiliar with the hereditary descent of kingly power, while the idea had not yet dawned of a Divine right resident in the Prophet's family. It was thoroughly in accord with Arabian practice that the Muslim community should elect its own leader, just as in heathen days the tribe chose its own chief. (A Literary History of the Arabs)

Professor Nicholson says that the Arabs were unfamiliar with the hereditary descent of kingly power. He may be right. The Arabs, however, were unfamiliar with many other things such as belief in the Oneness of God, and they had great familiarity with their idols of stone and wood; they clung to them tenaciously, and many of them died for them.

Nevertheless, the "unfamiliarity" of the Arabs with hereditary descent of kingly power did not last long; it proved to be very short-lived. In fact, their "unfamiliarity" lasted less than thirty years (from 632 to 661). After those first thirty years of unfamiliarity with the principle of hereditary descent of kingly power, they became very much familiar with it, and their new familiarity has lasted down to our own times.

Being "unfamiliar" with the principle of hereditary descent of kingly power, the Arabs were groping in darkness, when suddenly they stumbled upon a precedent from their own pre-Islamic past, from the days when they were idolaters, and they grabbed it. They were thrilled that they had found "salvation."

Francesco Gabrieli

With the election of Abu Bakr the principle was established that the Caliphate or Imamate (Imam in this case is a synonym of caliph) had to remain in the Meccan clan of the Quraysh from which Mohammed came. But at the same time the elective character of the post was sanctioned, as that of the sayyid or chief of the tribe had been in the pagan society, by

rejecting the legitimist claims of the family of the Prophet (Ahl-al-Bayt), personified by Ali. (The Arabs, A Compact History, 1963)

Franceso Gabrieli says that with the election of Abu Bakr the principle was established that the Caliphate would remain in the Meccan clan of the Quraysh. But he does not say who established this "principle." Does it have the authority of the Qur’an or the traditions of the Prophet to support it? It doesn't have. Actually, it was an ad hoc "principle" invoked by those men who wanted to appropriate the Caliphate or Imamate for themselves. They found this "principle" very profitable because it enabled them to seize the government of Muhammad, and to hang on to it while precluding his children from it. But as pragmatic as this "principle" is, it has its sanction, not in Qur’an but in "the pagan society," as pointed out by the historian himself.

Bernard Lewis

The first crisis in Islam came at the death of the Prophet in 632. Muhammad had never claimed to be more than a mortal man - distinguished above others because he was God's messenger and the bearer of God's word, but himself neither divine nor immortal. He had, however, left no clear instructions on who was to succeed him as leader of the Islamic Community and ruler of the nascent Islamic state, and the Muslims had only the meager political experience of pre-Islamic Arabia to guide them. After some arguments and a moment of dangerous tension, they agreed to appoint Abu Bakr, one of the earliest and most respected converts, as khalifa, deputy, of the Prophet – thus creating, almost incidentally, the great historical institution of the Caliphate. (The Assassins, 1968)

As stated earlier, the canard that Muhammad, the Messenger of God, did not leave any instructions on who was to succeed him as leader of the Islamic community, has become an Article of Faith with most historians, both ancient and modern, Muslim and non-Muslim. One may perhaps condone the Sunni historians for clinging to this "article of faith" but it is incredible that scholars of such range and distinction as Nicholson and Bernard Lewis have done nothing more in their works on Islam than to recast a stereotype of history which was "handed down" to them by the court historians of Damascus and Baghdad of earlier centuries. Bernard Lewis, however, has conceded, like Nicholson and Franceso Gabrieli, that those Muslims who appointed Abu Bakr as their khalifa, had only the meager political experience of pre-Islamic Arabia to guide them.

Bernard Lewis further says that the great historical institution of the Caliphate was born "almost incidentally."

The most important political institution of Islam – the Caliphate – was thus born "almost incidentally!"

George Stewart

The office of the Caliphate came into being not from deliberate plan or foresight, but almost from accident … the Caliphate was molded by the turbulent accidents of the age that gave it birth. (The Traditional Near East, 1966)

Writing about the pre-Islamic Arab society, Professor John Esposito, says:

"A grouping of several related families comprised a clan. A cluster of several clans constituted a tribe. Tribes were led by a chief (shaykh) who was selected by a consensus of his peers – that is, the heads of leading clans or families." Islam – the Straight Path, 1991, page 5)

In the same book (and the same chapter), Professor Esposito further says – on page 16:

"… A society based on tribal affiliation and man-made tribal law or custom was replaced by a religiously bonded community (the Muslim umma) governed by God's law."

(Abu Bakr was selected chief (shaykh) by "a consensus of peers – that is, the heads of leading clans or families." It was the "man-made tribal law or custom" which invested him with power. One thing that was not invoked in his selection, was the "God's law.")

All the historians quoted above, are unanimous in stating that:

1. Muhammad, the Messenger of God, gave no instructions to his umma regarding the character of the future government of Islam, and he did not designate any person to be its head after his own death. In the matter of succession, he had no clear line of policy; and;

2. When Muhammad died, the Muslims had to find a new leader for the community. Lacking guidance and precedent, they had no choice but to fall back upon the political institutions or traditions of the Times of Ignorance to find a leader, and Abu Bakr was their choice.

If these historians are right, then it was a most egregious omission on the part both of Al-Qur'an al-Majid and its Interpreter and Promulgator, Muhammad, not to enlighten the Muslims in the matter of selecting their leaders.

But there was not and could not be such an egregious omission on the part either of Qur'an or of Muhammad. Qur'an has stated, in luminous and incisive words what are the qualifications of a leader appointed by

God, and Muhammad has told the umma, in luminous and incisive words, who possesses those qualifications. (This subject has been dealt with in another chapter).

At the moment, however, Abu Bakr was elected khalifa of the Muslims. God's Law was not invoked in his election. His election, therefore, raises some fundamental questions, such as:

1. The wishes of God and His Apostle did not figure anywhere in Abu Bakr's election. Since he was elected by some companions of the Apostle, he was their representative or the representative of the Muslims. The Apostle alone could select his successor, and he did not select Abu Bakr. Can Abu Bakr still be called the successor of the Apostle of God?

2. The most important role in any social organization is played by the government or rather, by the head of the government. Qur'an asserts that it is comprehensive and has not omitted anything of importance. But the partisans of Abu Bakr say that Qur'an has not told the Muslims how to find the head of their government. If they are right, then can we claim before the non-Muslims that Qur'an is a complete and a perfect code, and has not overlooked any important detail of man's life from consideration?

3. If Muhammad Mustafa himself did not guide the Muslims in both the theory and the practice of government, then can we claim before the non-Muslims that he is the perfect model for all mankind in everything?

4. Were the teachings of Muhammad so imperfect and inconclusive that as soon as he died, his followers were compelled to invoke pagan customs, precedents and traditions? Since they did, doesn't he leave his own conduct open to question?

The truth is that Al-Qur'an al-Majid is a comprehensive and a perfect code of life. But only those people will find enlightenment in it who will seek it. There is no evidence that enlightenment from Qur'an was sought in the election of Abu Bakr. The "principle" invoked in his election was lifted out of the political experience of pagan Arabia. His leadership rested on a custom grounded in pre-Islamic tribal mandate.

Just as Qur'an is the perfect code of life, Muhammad Mustafa, its Bringer and Interpreter, is the perfect model for mankind. He knew that he was subject to the same laws of life and death as were the other mortals. He was also endowed with a sense of history, and knew what happened when great leaders died. One thing he could not do, was to let his people became mavericks once again as they were in the Times of Ignorance. One thing that could not escape and did not escape his attention, was the principle of succession in the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

Abu Bakr was elected in the outhouse of Saqifa as the head of the government of the Muslims with the support of Umar bin al-Khattab. Therefore, his government, as well as the governments of his two successors – Umar and Uthman – all three, were the "products" of Saqifa. I shall identify their governments as the governments of Saqifa to distinguish them from the government of Ali ibn Abi Talib which was not a product of Saqifa. Ali's government was the (restored) Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

Chapter 46

The Sunni Theory of Government

Those Muslims who claim that they follow the traditions (the statements and practices) of Muhammad Mustafa, the Prophe of Islam, and of his companions, are called Ahl-es-Sunnat wal-Jama'at or Sunni. They also call themselves "orthodox" Muslims, and they make up the overwhelming majority of the Muslims in the world.

The Sunni Muslims believe that the Prophet of Islam did not designate anyone as his successor, and he (probably) assumed that after his death, the Muslims would find a leader for themselves. They further say that the Prophet did not even tell his followers how they ought to select their future leaders or what qualifications those leaders should have. Thus, lacking both precedent and guidance in the matter of finding their leaders, the companions had no choice but to take recourse to improvisation.

But improvisation is not policy, and inevitably, it turned out to be a rather erratic manner of finding leaders of the Muslim umma (community). In one case the companions found a leader through what was supposed to be an election. In another case, the first incumbent (who was elected), nominated and appointed his own successor. In the third instance, the second incumbent (who was nominated), appointed a committee of six men and charged them with the duty of selecting one out of themselves as the future leader of the Muslim community.

The third leader, so selected, was killed in the midst of anarchy and chaos, and the umma was left without a head. The companions then turned to the family of their Prophet, and appealed to one of its members to take charge of the government of the Muslims, and thereby to save it from breakdown and dissolution.

The fourth incumbent was still ruling the Muslims when a new candidate for leadership arose in Syria. He brushed aside the hoax of election, challenged the lawful sovereign of the Muslims by invoking the principle of brute force, and succeeded in capturing the government. His action brought the number of the "principles" for finding leaders of the Muslim umma to four, viz.

1. Election:
Abu Bakr was elected khalifa (successor of the Prophet) by a majority vote in Saqifa.(Ali ibn Abi Talib, the fourth incumbent, was also elected khalifa by a majority of the Muhajireen and Ansar who were present in Medina at the death of the third khalifa).

2. Nomination:
Umar was appointed by Abu Bakr as his successor.

3. Selection by plutocrats:
Uthman was selected khalifa by a committee of six men appointed by Umar.

4. Seizure of the government by naked force:
Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan seized the government of the Muslims by military action.

The Sunni Muslims consider all these four "principles" as lawful and valid. In this manner, four different "constitutional" modes of finding a leader for the Muslim umma came into being.

Here it should be pointed out that though the Sunni Muslims have given to each of these four different modes of finding leaders for the umma, the "status" of a "principle," none of them was derived from the Book of God (Qur'an) or from the Book of the Prophet (Hadith). All of them were derived from the events which took place after the death of the Prophet of Islam.

In the history of any country, constitution-making is the first step toward nation-building. The constitution is the organic law of the land. It is the basic framework of public authority. It determines and defines the responsibilities, duties and powers of the government. All major decisions affecting the interests of the nation, are taken in the light of its

principles. Whatever is in agreement with it, is held legal and valid; whatever is not, is discarded as unconstitutional.

H.A.R. Gibb

The law precedes the state, both logically and in terms of time; and the state exists for the sole purpose of maintaining and enforcing the law." (Law in the Middle East)

But the Sunni theory of government suffers from a built-in anomaly. As a rule, policies and actions of the political leaders ought to follow the principles of the constitution; but they do not. Instead, it is the constitution that follows the events resulting from the decisions and actions of the political leaders. In other words, it is not the constitution that runs the government; it is, instead, the government, i.e., the political leaders heading the government who "run" the constitution.

Actually, there is no such thing as a Sunni theory of government. Whenever a new event took place, the Sunni jurists invoked a new "theory" or a new "principle" to rationalize it. In this manner they invested their theory of government with a protean character and a flexibility which is truly remarkable.

The Sunni theory and practice of government have been studied and analyzed by many students of Islamic political development, both ancient and modern, Muslim and non-Muslim. The author of Sharh-Mawaqif, a classical Arab writer, believes that the only requirement in a candidate for leadership, is his ability to seize and to hold power. He says:

"When an Imam dies and a person possessing the necessary qualifications claims that office (without the oath of allegiance, i.e., Bay'a, having been taken for him, and without his having been nominated to succeed), his claim to caliphate will be recognized, provided his power subdues the people; and apparently the same will be the case when the new caliph happens to be ignorant or immoral. And similarly when a caliph has thus established himself by superior force and is afterwards subdued by another person, the overpowered caliph will be deposed and the conqueror will be recognized as Imam or Caliph."

Another analyst of classical times, Taftazani, is of the opinion that a leader may be a tyrant or he may be immoral; he is nevertheless a lawful ruler of the Muslims. He writes in his book, Sharh-Aqa'id-Nasafi:

"An Imam is not liable to be deposed on the grounds of his being oppressive or impious."

Stewart Robinson has quoted Imam Ghazzali, in his book, The Traditional Near East, as saying:

"An evil-doing and barbarous sultan must be obeyed."

Some modern analysts of the Islamic political thought have also noted the inconsistencies in the Sunni theory of government. Following is the testimony of a few of them:

H.A.R. Gibb

Sunni political theory was, in fact, only the rationalization of the history of the community. Without precedents, no theory, and all the imposing fabric of interpretation of the sources, is merely the post eventum justification of the precedents which have been ratified by ijma. (Studies on the Civilization of Islam, 1962)

Bernard Lewis

The first four caliphs, sanctified by Muslim tradition as the righteous rulers, did indeed emerge from the Muslim elite on a non-hereditary basis, by processes which might be described as electoral in the Sunni legal sense; but three of the four reigns were ended by murder, the last two amid civil war. Thereafter, the Caliphate in effect became hereditary in two successive dynasties, the Umayyads and the Abbasids, whose system and style of government owed rather more to the autocratic empires of antiquity than to the patriarchal community of Medina. The subject's duty of obedience remained, and was indeed reinforced; the Caliph's obligation to meet the requirements of eligibility and fulfill the conditions of incumbency was emptied of most of its content.

This disparity between theory and practice – between the noble precepts of the law and the brutal facts of government - has led some scholars to dismiss the whole political and constitutional system of the classical Muslim jurists as an abstract and artificial construction, as little related to reality as the civil liberties enshrined in the constitutions of modern dictatorships. The comparison is exaggerated and unjust. The great

jurists of medieval Islam were neither stupid nor corrupt – neither ignorant of reality, nor suborned to defend it. On the contrary, they were moved by a profound religious concern, arising precisely from their awareness of the gap between the ideals of Islam and the practice of Muslim states. The problem of the juristic writers on Muslim government was deeper than that posed by the conduct of one or another individual ruler. It concerned the direction taken by Muslim society as a whole since the days of the Prophet – a direction that had led it very far from the ethical and political ideas of prophetic Islam. Yet to impugn the validity of the system of government under which the Muslims lived was to impugn the orthodoxy of the Islamic umma, a position unacceptable to the Sunni ulema, whose very definition of orthodoxy rested on the precedent and practice of the community. The jurist was thus obliged, in some measure, to justify the existing order, so as to vindicate the Sunni faith and system against the charge that they had gone astray and had led the Muslims into a state of sin. (The chapter on Politics and War published in the volume, Legacy of Islam, 1974)

G. E. Von Grunebaum

In the presentation of the role of the caliph, one senses the uneasy efforts of the author to harmonize the ideal task and the humble facts of his period. The law has laid down unalterable principles, never envisaging the increasing incapacity of the prince of the Believers to exercise even his more modest duties. So theory is compelled to compromise, to stretch the concept of election to include election by one qualified voter - in other words, to sanction the actual situation in which the caliph is appointed by his predecessor or the military leader who happens to be in control. Even the possibility of a plurality of leaders of the community has to be admitted. As in other ages and other civilizations, the theory of power comes to be a weapon in the fight for power. (Islam, London, 1969)

John Alden Williams

A representative statement of how Muslim legalists of the later medieval period viewed the problems of power and Islamic leadership is shown by a Syrian contemporary of Ibn Taymiya (and with whom the Hanbali naturally disagreed). Ibn Jama'a (d. 1333) who was one of the highest officials of the Mamluke religious establishment, and twice Chief

Qadi of Cairo. Although he was a Shaf'i, like al-Mawardi, it is Ibn Jama'a's view which conforms to that of Ahmad ibn Hanbal in the creedal statement found in the dogma: the Imam in power is to be obeyed regardless of how he came there. In a conflict between unity and justice, the unity of the umma must have precedence. By extension, whoever wields effective power in any area must be recognized by the Imam, if he has no means of removing him. In short, rulers must be treated as if they were perfect whether they are or not: the need of the Community guarded from error require it. It is a logical view but Ibn Taymiya felt that it was morally bankrupt. (From Imam and Legality. From Emancipated Judgment in the Governance of Muslims. By Ibn Jama'a (d. 1333 A.D.), Al-Ahkam fi Tadbir Ahl al-Islam).

'The Imamate is of two sorts: that by election, and that by usurpation. The elected Imamate is confirmed by two methods, and the usurped Imamate by a third method. The first method in the elected Imamate is by an oath of those with power to loose and bind. The second method is for the Imam to be chosen as successor by the one before him.

'As for the third method, by which the acclamation of a usurper is made valid, it is effected by overcoming the wielder of effective power, and if there is no Imam at the time, and one sets himself up who is otherwise not qualified for the office, and overcomes people by his power and by his troops without any election or appointment to the succession, then his acclamation is valid and one is bound to obey him, so that the unity of the Muslims be assured and they speak with one voice. It makes no difference if he is ignorant or unjust, according to the most correct opinion, and then another rises and overcomes the first by his power and troops, and the first is deposed, then the second becomes the Imam, for the sake, as we have said, of the welfare of the Muslims and their unity of expression. For this reason, Umar's son said at the Battle of Harra: "We are with the one who wins" (page 91).

In effect, the Umma entrusted its affairs to a Caliph, and asked him to be a perfect absolute ruler. Apart from the question of whether this is not usually a contradiction in terms, there was no sure apparatus for choosing him or ensuring a peaceful transmission of his power, and often or even usually men came to power by violent means. Once they were there, there was no mechanism for removing them except more violence, which was forbidden by law. It was a melancholy fact that in most states,

except those few like the Ottoman and Mughal empires who succeeded in establishing the principle of hereditary succession, "nothing so well suited a man for power as criminal instincts.". (Themes of Islamic Civilization, 1971, University of California Press, Berkeley)

The Sunni jurists and theorists were capable of making endless adjustments and compromises. They were willing to acknowledge as lawful rulers, not only the Muslim tyrants and usurpers but also the non-Muslim ones.

Bernard Lewis

Much has been written about the influence of the Crusades on Europe. Rather less has been written about the effects of these and related struggles on the lands of Islam. For the first time since the beginning, the Muslims had been compelled by military defeat to cede vast areas of old Islamic territory to Christian rulers, and to leave large Muslim populations under Christian rule. Both facts were accepted with remarkable equanimity. In both West and East, Muslim rulers were willing to have dealings with their new neighbors, and even on occasion to make alliances with them against brother Muslims - as an obligation of the Holy Law - of submitting to tyrants, had little difficulty in extending the argument to include unbelievers. 'Whose power prevails must be obeyed,' provided only that he allows Muslims to practice their religion and obey the Holy Law. The realm of such a sovereign may even, according to some jurists, be considered as part of the House of Islam. (Politics and War, published in the book, Legacy of Islam).

The sum and substance of the foregoing analysis is that the Sunni theory of government admits of only one principle, viz., brute force. Almost all Sunni jurists and theorists have given their blessings to this "principle." As a principle, brute force has been the only constant of the Sunni theory of government ever since Muawiya seized the caliphate in A.D. 661. It means that if a man can revive, in the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, as elsewhere, the ancient law known as "Might is Right," he is the lawful ruler of the Muslim umma. The government has no theory or structure or instrumentality beyond arbitrary force. The commandments of God enshrined in Al-Qur'an al-Majid, the wishes, the precedents and the commandments of His Messenger, and the code of ethics, all are, irrelevant.

Not so surprisingly perhaps, this attitude of the Sunni jurists persists into modern times. The Congress of the Caliphate meeting in Cairo, Egypt, in 1926, laid it down that a Muslim can legitimately become a caliph if he establishes his claim by conquest, even if he does not fulfill any of the other conditions required by the jurists.

In his analysis given above, Dr. Williams has quoted Abdullah the son of Umar bin al-Khattab (the second khalifa) as stating that he (Abdullah) is with the winner whoever he may be. This Abdullah was noted for his piety and religious zeal and knowledge. He spent or tried to spend as much time in the company of the Prophet as he could, and if he (Abdullah) said anything, it was (and still is) considered something most authoritative in the entire Sunni establishment. It's amazing that he didn't think that in any conflict between two individuals or two groups, the question of right and wrong had any relevance. The only important thing was winning. According to him, whoever wins, is right. If a gangster succeeds in liquidating all his competitors and becomes the unquestioned winner in a struggle for power, then the logic of success would make him the ideal material for the most important executive office in the Muslim world. All he has to do to prove that he is the most highly qualified candidate for the throne of caliphate, is to demonstrate that he can seize it by brute force, and if he does, it will be his - no credentials in Islam like brute force!

The Sunni jurists, theorists and political analysts have shown astonishing consistency, in all their expositions, in upholding the principle that obedience must be given to whoever has power in his hands. This probably is the reason why passive obedience to the ruler has been, in the words of Elie Kedourie, "the dominant political tradition in Islam," and why the excessive respect of the Muslims for the fait accompli has given "its unmistakable character to Muslim history."

The Shia Muslims discount the Sunni theory of government for its lack of moral consensus and its lack of consistency. They say that a principle must either be right or it must be wrong, and the only touchstone to test if it is right or wrong, is Al-Qur’an al-Majid. Muslims of the whole world may unanimously enact a law but if it is repugnant to Qur’an, it cannot be Islamic. The source of moral consensus in Islam is Qur’an, and not the "majority."

The Shia Muslims also say that there must be consistency in the application of a law or a principle. But if there is not, and a new "law" or a new "principle" has to be invoked to fit each new situation, then it will have to be called not policy but expediency. As noted above, the only consistency in the Sunni theory of government is to be found in the unqualified acceptance, by Sunni jurists and scholars, of the "principle" that power is the arbiter of this world, and Muslims, therefore, must kowtow to it. Even Imam Ghazali says that this "principle" must be upheld because it is a commandment to the Muslims of Al-Qur'an al-Majid itself.

Imam Ghazali is one of the most prestigious figures in the Muslim world. He is generally considered the greatest theologian of Sunni Islam. Some Sunni scholars have gone so far as to claim that if any man could be a Prophet after Muhammad Mustafa, he would be Imam Ghazali. And yet, he advised Muslims to acquiesce in the abuse of autocratic power by a dictator or a military leader because (he said that) their obligation to obey the established authority rested upon the text of Qur'an itself: "Obey God, His Apostle and those at the head of the affairs." It is amazing that a man like Imam Ghazali could do nothing more than endorse a most stereotypical interpretation of this verse.

Al-Qur'an al-Majid, incidentally, is a stranger to all the theories of government and principles of political organization discovered, articulated and codified by the majority of the Muslims, and this for a very simple reason, viz., it has its own theory of government and its own political philosophy. It does not have, therefore, any interest in any alien theory or philosophy of government.

Qur'an's political philosophy has been dealt with in another chapter in this book.

Chapter 47

The Struggle for Power I

The Sunni Muslims assert that all companions of Muhammad Mustafa, the blessed Messenger of God, were models of exemplary deportment, and that they were untouched by greed for money, lust for power or any other worldly ambition. They also say that all companions loved each other and that their mutual relations were uncontaminated by any cynicism or jealousy.

Such, unfortunately, is far from being the case. We wish it had been so but the evidence of history does not support such an assumption, and brutal facts rip apart the myth and rhetoric the admirers of the companions have passed on to us. Their most rabid admirer cannot deny that the struggle for power among them erupted even before the body of the Prophet was given a burial. The evidence of history, therefore, should make it possible for us to make a more realistic assessment of the character of the companions of the Prophet, and their various roles in the story of Islam.

It would, of course, be humanly impossible for all the companions of the Prophet to be alike in all respects. No two individuals register identical behavior reactions to extraneous events and circumstances. Acceptance of Islam, and the companionship of its Prophet did not necessarily sublimate the instincts of every Arab. They were a mixed group. After accepting Islam, some of them reached great heights; other remained where they were.

The difficulty in evaluating the role of a companion of the Prophet is compounded by the looseness of its definition. According to one definition, any Muslim who saw the Prophet of Islam, was his companion. A great many Muslims saw him during the 23 years of his ministry as

God's Messenger, and all of them, therefore, were his "companions." But the Shia Muslims do not accept this definition. They say that the title of a companion was something that Muhammad alone could bestow upon someone. If he did not, then it was not for others to claim this honor.

The Sunni Muslims quote a "tradition" of the Apostle in which he is alleged to have said: "All my companions are like stars. No matter from which one of them you seek guidance, you will find it." He is also reported to have said: "All my companions are fair, just and right."

If these traditions are authentic, and all companions of the Prophet are indeed "stars," then very strangely, very surprisingly, one of the stars themselves; in fact, one of the most dazzling stars in the whole galaxy of the companions, expressed some serious reservations about them. The star in question is Umar bin al-Khattab, the second khalifa of the Muslims. Not only did he show that he disagreed with these two and other similar traditions; he even defied them. During his own caliphate, he ordered the companions of the Prophet– the stars–to stay in Medina or not to leave Medina without his permission. He thus restricted their freedom of movement, and they resented this restriction. But he took pains to explain to them that he was doing so in their own interest!

In this regard, Dr. Taha Husain writes in his book, Al-Fitnatul-Kubra (The Great Upheaval), published in 1959 by the Dar-ul-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt:

Umar had a policy vis-à-vis the leading Muhajireen and Ansar. They were among the earliest men to accept Islam, and they were held in great esteem by the Prophet himself. During his lifetime, he put many of them in charge of important affairs. Umar also consulted them in all matters of public interest, and he too made many of them his companions and advisers. Nevertheless, he feared fitna (mischief) for them, and he also feared mischief from them. Therefore, he detained them in Medina, and they could not go out of Medina without his permission. He did not allow them to go to the conquered countries except when he ordered them to go. He feared that people in those countries would "lionize" them (because of their status as companions of the Prophet), and feared that this would lead them (the companions) into temptations. He also feared the consequences of this "lionization" of the companions, for the

government. There is no doubt that this restriction was resented by many of the companions, especially by the Muhajireen among them.

It would only be fair if we critically examine the policy of Umar vis-à-vis this distinguished group among the companions. When he ordered them to stay in Medina, he was perhaps right in his policy. Why should we not call things by their right name? Or, better still, why not translate the reason that prompted Umar to detain the companions in Medina, in modern terms? Umar feared that the companions, if they go into the provinces, might yield to the temptation of exploiting their influence and prestige!

If the events following the death of the Prophet are studied in their human context, it will provide a cushion to absorb the shock for those Muslims who expect the companions to be angels but find them common, garden-variety men. If many of the companions revealed themselves as men driven by ambition and self-interest after the death of the Prophet, it was so because in his lifetime they had no hope or opportunity of realizing them. But as soon as he died, they felt that they were free to pursue their own goals in life.

The traditional Sunni approach to the assessment of the role of the companions has been what Thomas Fleming has called "the golden glow approach." This approach depicts everyone of the companions as a combination saint-hero and genius. But this depiction is not true to life, and because it is not, it puts them out of focus. A more realistic view would be that the companions were human like the rest of mankind, and that they too could yield to the temptation of taking advantage of an opportunity or of power in their hands.

Lord Action, the famous British historian, and himself a devout Catholic, once offered the following admonition to those people who made excuses for the excesses of the Catholic Church's Renaissance Popes:

"I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men, with a favorable presumption that they did no wrong … Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely … There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it."

Al-Qur'an al-Majid has paid rich tributes to those Muslims who proved themselves worthy of the companionship of Muhammad. But it

has also indicted those among them who were unworthy of it. Many verses were revealed in their indictment.

The reputation of many of the companions of the Prophet was smudged with jealousy. Their resentment at the appointment of Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha as Supreme Commander of the Syrian expedition, was a manifestation of this jealousy. In later years, the same jealousy led to the murder of one caliph, and led to rebellion against another. Not many among the companions made a conscious effort to suppress their jealousy in the broader interests of Islam, and of the umma of the Apostle.

The conflicts of the companions have long since passed into history. It should, therefore, be possible for the modern Muslim to rise above the emotional commitments of the past, and to take a critical look at the "track record" of all of them. It may be difficult but it is possible to do so if the object of his devotion is not the personalities but only truth. What is important after all, is perception and not sentiment!

Muhammad Mustafa had formally "crowned" Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor at Ghadeer-Khumm, and had declared him to be the future sovereign of all Muslims. There were a few companions who were aware that the actions of the Prophet were beyond any question. They believed that all his deeds were inspired by heaven, and that they were not prompted by any tribalism. They knew that if he had elevated Ali as the Chief Executive of the Islamic State, it was because the latter had all the qualities essential for such responsibility.

But there was another group of the companions which believed that the Prophet was not altogether free from the feelings of asabiyya (tribal solidarity; a kind of tribal nationalism; "my tribe, right or wrong;" clan spirit). They attributed his declarations and statements pointing out Ali's excellence, to his asabiyya. The sovereignty of Ali was not acceptable to them. They considered themselves just as well-qualified to run the nascent state of Medina as Ali, and they were aware that to actually run it, they would have to act before it was too late.

There was only one way for members of this group to realize their ambition, and that was to capture the government of Medina at the opportune time. With this aim in view, they began to publicize a doctrine of

their own, viz., the Prophethood and the caliphate ought not to combine in the same house. There was no way for them to take Prophethood out of the house of Muhammad but perhaps it was possible to take caliphate out of it.

They decided to try. The campaign was opened by Umar bin al-Khattab. He was the leader of the group which wished to capture the government. There is on record a brief exchange he once had, during his own reign, with Abdullah ibn Abbas, in which he said that since the Prophet was a member of the clan of Hashim, the "Arabs" did not like the idea that the caliph should also be a member of the same clan. Their exchange went as follows:

Umar: I know that the Arabs did not want that you (the Banu Hashim) should become their leaders.

Abdullah ibn Abbas: Why?

Umar: Because they did not like the idea that both spiritual and temporal authority should become the monopoly of the Banu Hashim for all time.

Abbas Mahmood Al-Akkad, the modern Egyptian historian, says in his book, 'Abqariyyat al-Imam Ali, published in Cairo in 1970:

Umar disclosed the reason in the following statement why after the death of the Apostle, Ali could not become his successor:

‘The Quraysh elected a khalifa out of its own freewill. They were not willing to see that Prophethood and Caliphate both should belong to the Banu Hashim.

Those Qurayshites who were impelled by their ambition to seize the government of Muhammad, had worked out an elaborate plan for this purpose, leaving nothing to chance.

Bukhari, Abu Daud and Tirmidhi (the collectors of traditions) have quoted Abdullah bin Umar bin al-Khattab as saying:

In the times of the Prophet we used to say that the best men in the umma are Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman. (The Virtues of the Ten Companions – by Mahmood Said Tantawi of the Council of Islamic Affairs, Cairo, Egypt, 1976)

John Alden Williams

Ahmad ibn Hanbal said: "The best of this Umma - after the Prophet – is Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, then Umar ibn al-Khattab, then Uthman ibn Affan. We give preference to those three (over Ali) as the Companions of God's Messenger gave preference. They did not differ about it. Then after those three come the Five Electors chosen by Umar as he lay dying (as-hab al-Shura): Ali ibn Abi Talib, Zubayr, Talha, Abd al-Rahman ibn Auf, and Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas. All of them were suited for caliphate, and each of them was an Imam. On this we go according to the hadith of Umar's son: When the Messenger of God was living – God bless him and give him peace – and his Companions were still spared, we used to number first Abu Bakr, then Umar, then Uthman, and then keep silent." (Some Essential Hanbali Doctrines from a Creedal Statement). (Themes of Islamic Civilization, 1971)

The statement of Abdullah bin Umar is a testimony that the campaign of the companions to elevate Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman at the expense of Ali, was launched in the lifetime of the Apostle himself, in anticipation of and in preparation for, the times ahead. The Quraysh had decided beforehand who would be the leaders of the umma after the death of the Apostle, and in what order.

When the Apostle of God died, Abu Bakr was not in Medina; he was at his home in Sunh, a suburb of Medina. But Umar was present at the scene. He drew his sword and began to shout:

"The hypocrites say that the Apostle of God is dead. But he is not dead. He is alive. He has gone, as Moses did, to see his Lord, and will return in forty days. If anyone says that he is dead, I will kill him."

Many Muslims were thrown in doubt when they heard Umar ranting. By brandishing the sword, and by threatening to kill, he had succeeded in silencing the people. Some of them thought he might be right, and the Apostle might not be dead. Some others began to whisper to each other and to ask if the Apostle had really died. But presently Abu Bakr arrived in the Mosque and read the following verse from Al-Qur'an al-Majid before the crowd of the Muslims:

Muhammad is but the Apostle of God. If he dies or if he is killed in battle, will you all relapse into idolatry? (Chapter 3; verse 144)

When the Muslims heard this verse, they were convinced that Muhammad, the Apostle of God, had really died, and no doubt was left in anyone's mind about it.

As noted before, Umar did not let Muhammad Mustafa write his last will and testament fearing that he would designate Ali as his successor. Then the Prophet died. But during the interval between the death of the Prophet and Abu Bakr's arrival, Umar was still fearful lest the Muslims present in the Mosque, acknowledge Ali as their sovereign. To forestall this possibility, he drew the sword, and began to shout that Muhammad was not dead but was alive so that it would not occur to anyone that a new leader of the umma had to be chosen. Umar was suggesting by his manner that while the Prophet was still alive, who would need a successor; after all successors were for the dead and not for the living!

Many politicians, both before and since Umar, have concealed the news of the death of a king or the head of a state from the public until his heir has succeeded him into the purple.

The death of the Prophet was a fact. But was Umar going to kill a man if he stated that fact? Was he going to kill someone for speaking the truth? Is it a crime to say that a dead man is a dead man, and is the penalty for saying so death?

To convince the Muslims that Muhammad was not dead, Umar brought up the analogy of Moses. But the analogy suffered from an obvious flaw. The Israelites had seen Moses going away from them until he had gone out of their sight. But here the body of Muhammad Mustafa was lying in his chamber, and it had not gone out of the sight of any one. The Muslims, including Umar himself, could see it, and touch it, and feel that it was cold and lifeless.

Umar's Indian biographer, M. Shibli, and some others say that he (Umar) was threatening to kill Muslims out of his love for Muhammad. He was, they say, in a state of shock, and was unable to come to grips with reality!

Umar was in his mid-fifties when the Prophet died. Is it possible that he had never seen any man dying, and he didn't know what it means to die?

The brutal truth is that Umar was only playacting. His histrionics were a screen for his real intentions. His insistence that Muhammad was not dead, was one of a series of maneuvers to obscure the locus of authority and sovereignty from the public eye. One moment he was ready to kill anyone for saying that the Prophet had died but the very next moment, when Abu Bakr arrived, and read a verse from the Qur'an, he became an instant convert to the idea that he (the Prophet) was a mortal, and being a mortal, could die, and had actually died. He even pleaded his ignorance of the Qur'an, and said that it seemed to him that it was the first time that he heard the verse which Abu Bakr read to him and to the other Muslims in the Mosque.

Abu Bakr's arrival had reassured Umar, and all his senses returned to him with a vengeance. Then he rushed, with Abu Bakr, to Saqifa, to stake claims to khilafat, and to capture it before the Ansars could capture it. The burial of the body of the Prophet was something they could leave to the members of his own family.

Umar's campaign to prove that Muhammad Mustafa was alive, had suddenly collapsed. He was, at last, able to come to grips with reality!

A rule of the ancient Roman law was that suppressio veri is equal to suggestio falsi. This means that suppressing truth is equal to disseminating falsehood!

Earlier, in this chapter, I quoted a passage from the book, Al-Fitnatul-Kubra or The Great Upheaval, by Dr. Taha Husain, apropos of the restriction, imposed by Umar bin al-Khattab, the second khalifa of the Muslims, on the freedom of movement of the Muhajireen.

Umar forbade the Muhajireen to leave Medina without his permission. But who were these Muhajireen who were forbidden to leave Medina? All Muhajireen had left Medina – with two exceptions, viz., Uthman bin Affan and Ali ibn Abi Talib!

Since Uthman had little aptitude for conquest or administration, he might have voluntarily stayed in Medina. Umar, therefore, had to enact this ordinance exclusively for Ali.

Umar could not openly say that of all Muhajireen, Ali alone was forbidden to leave Medina. For what reason Umar could forbid Ali to leave Medina? Apparently none. He, therefore, had to employ the generic term "Muhajireen" to restrict Ali's freedom of movement.

And yet, it was Ali, if anyone, who would not be tempted to exploit his influence with the army, if that is what Umar was afraid of.

Chapter 48

The Struggle for Power II

The Meeting of the Ansar in Saqifa

In A.D. 622, the Ansar invited Muhammad, the blessed Messenger of God, into Medina, and they acknowledged him as their spiritual and temporal leader. Other Muslims of Makkah, i.e., the Muhajireen, also migrated to Medina, and the Ansar welcomed them with open arms. They shared their homes and their bread with them. On numerous occasions, they deprived their own children of food which they gave to the hungry Muhajireen.

Muhammad made Medina the capital of Islam, and in due course, the city began to acquire the characteristics of a state. As time went on, the tiny city-state burgeoned into a well-organized government with its own sources of revenue, its own treasury, army, system of justice and administrative and diplomatic apparatus.

It was inevitable that it would occur to the Ansars (and other Muslims) that a day would come when Muhammad, the founder of the State of Medina, would bid farewell to them and would leave this world. This possibility confronted them with some new and rather uncomfortable questions such as:

1. What will the death of Muhammad Mustafa, mean to the young State of Medina and to the Muslim umma?
2. Who would succeed Muhammad as the new head of the State of Medina when he dies?
3. What will be the status of the Ansar after the death of Muhammad? Would the new head of the State be just as fair and impartial as he is?

4. Would the Ansar still be masters in their own home – Medina – after the death of Muhammad?

The Ansar had heard the speech of the Apostle of God at Ghadeer-Khumm appointing Ali as his successor, and they had given this arrangement their whole-hearted support. But they had also sensed the under-current of hostility of the Muhajireen toward Ali, and they were not sure if his succession would be peaceful or if it would take place at all. It was very much obvious to them that there was massive opposition, among the Muhajireen, to his succession, and that, among them he was a minority of one. Once the Ansar grasped this fact, they decided to act for themselves. It was for this reason that they assembled in Saqifa.

One may condone the action of the Ansar even if one may not commend it because the thought uppermost in their minds, following the death of their master, Muhammad, was self-preservation. Though they ought to have deferred their political rally until after the burial of the body of their master, at the moment it appeared to them that they had to act immediately or else it would be too late.

As noted before, the Ansar had given sanctuary to Islam at a time when its situation was most forlorn. For the sake of Islam, they had made all Arabs their enemies. For the sake of Islam, they had pitted themselves against all Arabia. In every battle of Islam, they had acquitted themselves most honorably. Many of their young men were killed in these battles. (In the battle of Uhud 75 Muslims were killed; out of them four were Muhajireen, and the rest were all Ansars). They demonstrated their devotion to Islam and their loyalty to the Prophet at every juncture.

The Ansar knew that caliphate was Ali's right but they also knew about the "resolution" of the "Arabs" to keep caliphate out of the house of the Prophet. Their interpretation of this "resolution" was that the Muhajireen would not let Ali reach the throne of caliphate.

But if not Ali, then who else would be Muhammad's successor? The only obvious answer to this question was: some other Muhajir. But any Muhajir other than Ali was not acceptable to them – to the Ansar. They, therefore, decided to put forward their own candidate for the leadership of the umma. After all it was their support, they argued, and not the support of the Muhajireen, that had made Islam viable.

The anxiety of the Ansar is perfectly understandable. To them, the prospect of the government of Medina falling into the hands of the Umayyads, the traditional enemies of God and His Messenger, who had now become Muslim, was extremely frightful. They (the Ansar) had killed many of them in the battles of Islam. If the government of Medina which was consolidated with their (the Ansars') support, was ever captured by the children of those pagans whom they (the Ansar) had killed, how would they treat them (the Ansar), was the unspoken question in the heart of every Ansari. Events proved that their fears were not generated by any hallucination.

The Umayyads had fought bitterly against Islam and its Prophet. When the latter captured Makkah, they "accepted" Islam because there was little else they could do then. As noted before, the Prophet never gave them any positions of authority even though he gave them a generous share out of the spoils of the battle of Hunayn. On his part, it was a gesture of reconciliation but it did not mitigate their hostility to Islam.

But Muhammad, the Messenger of God, had not been dead long when Abu Bakr elevated these traditional enemies of Islam, and the dynastic foes of its Prophet, to the highest ranks in the army. He made Yazid, the son of Abu Sufyan, a general in his army. When Syria was conquered, Umar who had succeeded Abu Bakr as khalifa, made him (Yazid) its first governor. Yazid died a few years later whereupon Umar made his younger brother, Muawiya, the new governor of Syria. As if he had not done enough for the Umayyads, Umar, on his deathbed, manipulated the situation in a manner that guaranteed the succession of Uthman, another Umayyad. In the caliphate of Uthman, the members of his clan, the Umayyads, were ruling every province in the empire and they were commanding every division in the army.

The Ansar also feared that if the Muhajireen seized the government of Medina, then they (the Muhajireen) would belittle their (Ansars') services to Islam, and would relegate them to play a minor, if any, role in Islam.

Gifted with prescience as they were, the Ansar had made a correct and a realistic assessment of the situation. Their assembly in Saqifa was purely defensive in nature. It was prompted by the sheer instinct for

survival. But unfortunately, they were dogged by their own jealousies. Their jealousy caused their aims to be miscarried. Their tribal components – the Aus and the Khazraj – were suspicious of each other, and it was this suspicion that gave them away to the Muhajireen.

As already noted, the action of the Ansar in gathering in Saqifa is open to question, but their instinct was sound. The subsequent events amply proved that they were right and justified in questioning the intentions of the Muhajireen toward them. Among the Muhajireen, the only protector of their interests was Ali ibn Abi Talib. But when the Quraysh succeeded in blackballing him from power, they also succeeded in downgrading the Ansar to a mere rank-and-file status.

When Muhammad died, and Ali's succession was precluded, the Ansar ceased to be the masters in their own home – Medina!

Chapter 49

The Struggle for Power III

Saqifa Banu Sa'eda

Bukhari has quoted Umar bin al-Khattab as saying:
"When he (the Apostle) died, the Ansar opposed us. They gathered in the Saqifa Banu Sa'eda. Ali, Zubayr and their friends also opposed us."

What was it that Umar and his friends were doing, and which the Ansar opposed?
When the Apostle died, the Ansar, always sensitive to subsurface political currents, and fearful of the ambitions and intentions of the Muhajireen, gathered in an outhouse of Medina called Saqifa, and they told Saad ibn Ubada, their leader, what they knew about the plans of the Muhajireen. Saad was sick and he said to his son, Qays, that he did not feel strong enough to address the assembly, and that he would tell him what he wished to say, and he (Qays) should repeat it to the audience.

Saad spoke to his son, and he relayed its purport to the Ansar.
Saad's Speech
O group of Ansar! You enjoy a precedence in Islam which no one can deny, and this alone makes you something special in all Arabia. The Apostle of God preached Islam among his own people for 13 years and only a handful of them accepted his message. They were so weak that they were incapable of protecting him or of defending Islam. God in His mercy was pleased to bestow the honor of protecting him (Muhammad) upon you. He selected you out of all other people to give sanctuary to His Messenger and to other Muslims from Makkah. He was pleased to strengthen Islam through you so that you fought against the enemies of His Faith. You protected His Messenger from his enemies until the message of Islam spread in all Arabia. Through your swords, he conquered

Arabia for Islam, and it was through your swords that all pagans were overcome. Then the time came when the Messenger of God departed from this world; he was pleased with you when he was going into the presence of his Lord. Therefore, after his death, it is your right to rule Arabia."

The Ansar expressed unanimous agreement with Saad, and they added that in their opinion, there was no one better qualified than him to be the ruler of all Muslims.

It was at this time that Abu Bakr, Umar and Abu Obaida ibn al-Jarrah, arrived into the Saqifa. When the Ansar saw them, one of them – Thabit bin Qays – rose and addressed them as follows:

"We are the slaves of God, and we are the supporters of His Messenger. And you, the fugitives from Makkah, are a mere handful of men. But we know that you want to seize the government of Medina, and you want to exclude us from it." (Tabari and Ibn Atheer)

This is a revealing statement. It means that the Muhajireen were drawing up plans to grab power, and the gathering of the Ansar in Saqifa was only a response to their gambit.

When Thabit bin Qays made his disclosure, no one of the three Muhajireen contradicted him. Umar says that when Thabit bin Qays sat down, he rose to say something appropriate. "I had prepared a very good speech anticipating an occasion just like this," he said. (Tarikh-ul-Khulafa).

This is admission by Umar himself that he had made elaborate preparations beforehand to meet every contingency. But Abu Bakr restrained him, and himself rose to address the Ansar. He said:

"There is no doubt that God sent Muhammad with the true Faith and with the light of His religion. He (Muhammad) therefore, invited people to God's religion. We were the first to respond to his call. We were the first to accept Islam. Whoever accepted Islam after us, followed our lead. Furthermore, we are related to the Apostle of God, and we are the noblest of all Arabs in blood and country. There is no tribe that does not acknowledge the ascendancy of the Quraysh. And you, the Ansar, are

those who gave sanctuary and who helped. You are our brothers in faith. We love you and respect you more than any other people. But the leaders must be from the Quraysh. We shall be the rulers and you shall be the wazirs. You should not be jealous of us. You have helped us in the past, and now you ought not to be the first to oppose us. I call upon you to give your pledge of loyalty to one of these two men, Umar or Abu Obaida. I have chosen both of them for this purpose; both of them deserve this honor, and both of them are qualified for the position of the Amir."

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Umar and Abu Bakr came to the courtyard of Banu Saidah. Joined by a number of Muhajirun, they took their seats in the assembly. Soon, a speaker rose and addressed the Ansar as follows: "All praise and thanks belong to Allah. We are al-Ansar, i.e., the Helpers of God and we are the army of Islam. You, the Muhajireen, are merely a small group in the army. Nevertheless, you are trying to deprive us of our right of leadership."

Actually, for the Ansar, it was an old complaint, even in the lifetime of the Prophet. Now when Umar heard it again, he was very angry, and he was ready to put an end to it by the sword, if necessary. But Abu Bakr restrained him and asked him to act gently. He then turned to the Ansar and said: "O Ansar! We enjoy the noblest lineage and descendence. We are the most reputable and the best esteemed as well as the most numerous of any group in Arabia. Furthermore, we are the closest blood relatives of the Prophet. The Qur’an itself has given us preference. For it is God - may He be praised and blessed – Who said, First and foremost were al-Muhajirun, then al-Ansar, and then those who have followed these two groups in virtue and righteousness. We were the first to emigrate for the sake of God, and you are the Ansar, i.e., the Helpers. However, you are our brothers in faith, our partners in war, and our helpers against the enemy. All the good you have claimed about yourselves, is true, for you are the most worthy of mankind. But the Arabs will not accept the leadership of any tribe except the Quraysh. Therefore, we will be the leaders, and you will be our ministers." At this an Ansari stood up and said: "Every verdict will depend upon us. And our verdict is that you may have your own leader; we shall have our own." But Abu Bakr said that the leader of the Muslims must be from the

Quraysh, and the wazirs from the Ansar. At this point he held the hands of Umar and Abu Obaida and said: "Any one of these two men is qualified to be the leader of the Muslims. Choose any one of them." (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

But Umar rose and said in protest: "O Abu Bakr, it is not proper for anyone to take precedence over you because you are the best of all of us. You were the 'companion of the cave,' and you are the 'second of the two.' And has anyone forgotten that the Apostle ordered you to lead the prayer when he was sick? Therefore, you are the most qualified man to be his successor."

Another Ansari got up to answer Abu Bakr and Umar, and said: "We acknowledge your precedence in Islam and your other qualities, and we love you too. But we are afraid that after you, other people will capture the government, and they would not be fair and just to us. Therefore, we suggest that there should be two rulers, one a Muhajir and the other an Ansar (this was the first dead giveaway on the part of the Ansar of their own weakness). If the Muhajir dies, he should be replaced by a Muhajir, and if the Ansari dies, he should be replaced by another Ansari. If you accept this plan, we shall give you our pledge of loyalty. This is the best arrangement that can be made because if a Qurayshite becomes the sole head of the state, the Ansar will live in fear, and if an Ansari becomes the khalifa, the Quraysh would live in fear."

Abu Bakr spoke in reply thus:

"God sent Muhammad with His Book to mankind. At that time everyone worshipped idols. When Muhammad told them to destroy those idols, they resented it. They did not want to abandon them. Therefore, God selected the Muhajireen to bear testimony to Muhammad's prophethood. The rest of the Arabs insulted and persecuted the Muhajireen but they were steadfast in their support to him. They were the first to worship God, and they were the first to obey His Apostle. They are related to him, and they are his own folks. Therefore, they alone deserve to be his successors, and no one will challenge them in this except the unjust.

And you, O Ansar! you are a people whose excellence cannot be denied. No one can challenge your high position in Islam. God made you the supporters of His religion and His Apostle, and it was toward you

that he migrated. Therefore, your rank in Islam is highest after the Muhajireen. We love you and esteem you. But it is only proper that the leaders should be from the Muhajireen and the ministers from the Ansar. Whatever we do, we shall do by consulting you."

The next speaker was Hubab ibn al-Mandhir of Medina. He said:

"O group of Ansar! These people (the Muhajireen) are under your protection. They do not have any power to oppose you. You are the people of honor and power. The eyes of all Arabia are fixed on you, and you have the same precedence in Islam that they have. By God, they (the Muhajireen) never dared to worship God in public until you gave them sanctuary in your city. Nowhere has prayer been said openly except in your city. The idolaters and the polytheists have not been overcome except with your swords. Therefore, leadership is your right and not theirs. But if they do not agree to this, then let there be two leaders, one from each of the two groups."

Umar answered the speech of Hubab ibn al-Mandhir saying:

"It is impossible that there should be two kings in one realm. Arabs will never submit to the rule of anyone who is not a member of the Quraysh since the Apostle of God himself was a member of that tribe. The khalifa of the Muslims, therefore, must be a man of the same tribe as the Apostle himself. The fact that he was a Qurayshite, clinches all argument. We are Qurayshites, and no one can challenge us in our leadership role."

Hubab ibn al-Mandhir again said:

"O Ansar! Do not pay any attention to this man and to his companions. Caliphate is your right. Take it. If they do not acknowledge this right, kick them out of your city. Then you select a ruler from among yourselves. What you have won with your swords, do not give that away to these people, and if anyone opposes me now, I shall silence him with my sword."

Abu Obaida ibn al-Jarrah then stood up, and said:

"O group of Ansar! You were the first to support the Apostle of God and to give sanctuary to his religion. Are you now going to be the first to cause disruption in that religion?"

The next speaker was another Ansari, one Bashir bin Saad. He knew that the Ansar were determined to choose Saad ibn Ubada as the leader of the Muslim umma. He was jealous of Saad and did not want to see him as the sovereign of Arabia. Therefore, what he said in Saqifa was prompted, not by the love of Abu Bakr or the Muhajireen but by his jealousy of Saad. He said:

"O group of Ansar! Without a doubt we have precedence in Islam, and in the wars of Islam. But since it is so, we must not become self-seekers. Our aim should only be to win the pleasure of God, and to obey His Messenger. Our services to Islam were for the sake of God, and not for the sake of any worldly gains, and He will reward you for them. Therefore, we should not try to capitalize on those services now. The Apostle of God was from the tribe of Quraysh; therefore, it is right that his successors should also be from the same tribe. They deserve to be his heirs. Caliphate is their right and not ours, and we should not oppose them in this matter. Therefore, fear God, and do not try to take what is not yours."

This speech of Bashir bin Saad emboldened Abu Bakr to stand once again and say:

"As I said before, the leaders should be from the Quraysh. Therefore, O Ansar! do not create divisions among the Muslims. It is my advice to you that you give your pledge of loyalty to one of these two men present here, Umar and Obaida bin al-Jarrah. Both of them are worthy Qurayshites."

But Umar interrupted him saying, "How is it possible that anyone else should receive the pledge of loyalty while your are present among us. You are the oldest man in Quraysh, and you have spent more time in the company of the Apostle than any of us. Therefore, no one should put himself ahead of you. Extend your hand so that I may give you my pledge of loyalty."

Umar held Abu Bakr's hand, and placed his own hand on top of his as a sign of fealty. He had, by this act, acknowledged Abu Bakr as the khalifa.

Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah and Bashir bin Saad Ansari also stepped forward, placed their hands on the hand of Abu Bakr, signifying their allegiance to him.

Bashir bin Saad Ansari was showing much eagerness in taking the oath of loyalty to Abu Bakr. Hubab ibn al-Mandhir who was watching him, shouted:

"O Bashir! you are a traitor to your own people. We know why you have leapt forward to take the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr. You are jealous of Saad ibn Ubada, you miserable renegade. How you hate to see him become the Amir of the Muslims."

It was at this fateful moment that many of the Bedouin tribesmen who lived between Medina and Makkah, appeared on the scene. They were hostile to the Ansar, and they had entered the city when they heard the news of the death of the Apostle of God. Finding out what was afoot in Medina, they spread themselves around Saqifa. Their sudden appearance gave a tremendous boost to the morale of Abu Bakr and Umar; and at the same time, it put a crimp upon the assurance of the Ansar. The tribesmen were all armed. With their arrival, the leverage in the long debate between the Muhajireen and the Ansar, passed to the former.

G. E. Von Grunebaum

At the stormy session the Ansar were finally persuaded not to insist on the succession going to one of their own members nor on the double rule of a Companion and a Helper, and partly under pressure from the Bedouin who were streaming into the city, they agreed to do homage to Abu Bakr. (Classical Islam - A History 600-1258)

Umar said later that until the arrival of the tribesmen in Saqifa, he had grave doubts about the outcome of the debate with the Ansar. Their timely arrival, and the application of pressure by them on the Ansar, guaranteed the acquiescence of the latter in the accession of Abu Bakr to the throne.

Bashir's ploy had succeeded. He undermined the Ansar's will-to-fight. The protests of Saad ibn Ubada and Hubab ibn al-Mandhir were of no

avail. When Umar, Abu Obaida and Bashir took the oath of loyalty to Abu Bakr, the others followed like sheep. The Ansar had lost the battle!

The key to Abu Bakr's success in being elected khalifa in Saqifa was the mutual hostility of the two Medinan tribes of Aus and Khazraj. Both of them had fought a "Hundred Years' War" of their own, and they had suspended hostilities only because of their extreme physical exhaustion.

G. E. Von Grunebaum

The Aus and the Khazraj, had been in continuous state of guerrilla warfare against each other for generations. Their conflict came to a bloody climax in 617 in the "Battle of Bu'ath," after which the protagonists were so exhausted that it gradually dwindled into an armistice, interrupted only by occasional acts of vengeance. (Classical Islam - A History 600-1258)

The last great battle between the Aus and the Khazraj had been fought only four years before the arrival of the Prophet in Medina as Peace-Maker. Once both of them acknowledged him as their sovereign, they also agreed to defer to his judgment all their disputes, and they called a truce to their interminable wars. But as soon as the Peace-Maker and the Judge died, their old jealousies, fears and suspicions flared up once again.

When the leaders of the Aus noticed that the Khazraj had put forward Saad ibn Ubada – a Khazrajite – as the candidate for caliphate, they thought that if he was elected khalifa, then they – the Aus – would be reduced to the status of serfs for all time. Their interests, they figured, would be safeguarded better if the leader of the umma was a Muhajir from Makkah instead of a Khazrajite of Medina. They, therefore, hastened to assure Abu Bakr that they were loyal to him before the Khazraj could proclaim Saad ibn Ubada as the new lord of Medina. It were thus the Aussites of Medina who were actually instrumental in securing Abu Bakr's success in his election as khalifa. Other factors, such as the treachery of Bashir bin Saad, himself a Khazrajite, to his own tribe, the Khazraj; and the intervention of the Bedouin tribesmen, at a critical moment, also contributed to Abu Bakr's success.

Maxime Rodinson

The Medinians, especially those belonging to the tribe of Khazraj, sensed that the Qurayshite Emigrants who had come from Mecca with Mohammed of whom they had always been jealous, would now attempt to claim the leadership for themselves. The Prophet was dead. There was no longer any reason why they should submit to these foreigners. They called a meeting in the outhouse of one of their clans, the Banu Saida, to talk over the best way of safeguarding their interests. What they proposed to do was to elect one of their own leading men, Sa'd ibn Ubadah, as Chief of Medina.

Abu Bakr was in Mohammad's house, was warned of this and he hurried to the place along with his fellow politicians, Umar and Abu Ubayda. They were joined on the way by the chief of another Medinian tribe, the Aws, rivals of the Khazraj. The last thing they wanted was to see power in the hands of Khazraj. In the streets the excitement was spreading to the members of other tribes in Medina, who had no desire to play the part of pawns in any power game that was about to begin. As night fell, everyone had forgotten the body (of Mohammed) still lying in Aisha's little hut (sic).

The discussion that went on by the light of torches and oil lamps was lengthy, heated and confused. One Medinian proposed that two chiefs should be elected, one Qurayshite and one Medinian. Most people realized that that would be the way to court dissension and disaster for the community. Everyone was shouting at once; they may even have come to blows. (Mohammed translated by Ann Carter, 1971)

They did come to blows. Saad ibn Ubada seized Umar by his beard. Umar threatened to kill him if he pulled a single hair out of his beard. Umar said to Hubab ibn al-Mandhir: "May God kill you," and the latter said to him: "May God kill you."

Hubab ibn al-Mandhir made desperate efforts to save the situation. As he tried to stop the Ansar from taking the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr, a crowd rushed upon him, snatched his sword, and pushed him out of the way. They were the Bedouin supporters of the Muhajireen. Hubab lost his sword but he still struck at the faces of the citizens of Medina who were giving fealty to Abu Bakr. He cursed them and said: "O Ansar! I can see with my own eyes that your children are begging for food at the

doors of the houses of these Makkans but instead of getting food, are being kicked in the teeth by them, and are being driven away."

Abu Bakr asked Hubab: "Do you entertain such fears from me?" He said: "No. Not from you but from those who will come after you." Trying to reassure him, Abu Bakr said: "If that happens, you can always repudiate your allegiance to your khalifas." He bitterly retorted: "It would be too late then, and it would serve no purpose."

It was this chaotic, bohemian and raucous assembly in the outhouse of Saqifa which elected Abu Bakr as khalifa. The Ansar gave his election only a negative endorsement. They didn't, by any means, designate the best-qualified man. Umar very deftly shelved the question of qualification, and never let it pop up in the debate. The question of a candidate's qualifications was buried under a cloud of evasive rhetoric.

Saad ibn Ubada, the leader of the Khazraj, and the "runner-up" in the Saqifa no-holds-barred, free-for-all, was one of those men who refused to take the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr. He said to the latter: "O Abu Bakr! If I were not in this state of helplessness because of my debilitating sickness, I would have sent you and your friends back to Makkah to your own folks."

Saad then asked his friends to take him out of Saqifa. For some time Abu Bakr did not meddle with him, and then one day sent word to him asking him to come and to give him the pledge of loyalty. Saad refused. Umar pressed Abu Bakr to get the pledge by force. But Bashir bin Saad Ansari interposed by saying: "Once Saad has refused, he will never give you his pledge of loyalty. If you force him, it could lead to bloodshed, and all the Khazrajites will rise with him against you. In my opinion, it would not be prudent to force the issue. He is, after all, only one man, and left alone, cannot do much harm anyway."

All those men who were present in the court of the khalifa, applauded Bashir's opinion, and Saad was left in peace. He recovered from his sickness, and three years later, migrated to Syria.

The text of the speeches delivered in Saqifa, and the account of the events which took place there, have been taken from the following sources:

1. History – Tabari
2. Tarikh al-Kamil – Ibn Atheer
3. Kitab-al-Imama was-Siyasa – Ibn Qutayba Dinwari
4. Seeret-ul-Halabiyya – Halaby

Chapter 50

The Struggle for Power IV

When Abu Bakr was acknowledged khalifa in Saqifa, he, Umar bin al-Khattab and Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah returned to the Mosque of the Prophet. In the Mosque there were many people, among them, members of the clan of Umayya; Saad bin Abi Waqqas; Abdur Rahman bin Auf; and some other Muhajireen.

Seeing them huddled in little clusters, Umar shouted: "Abu Bakr has been elected khalifa of the Muslims. Now all of you here give him your pledge of loyalty. The Ansar, Abu Obaida and I have already done so."

The Umayyads present in the Mosque were the first to respond to Umar's call, and to take the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr. Saad bin Abi Waqqas, Abdur Rahman bin Auf and others followed them, and took the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr.

Almost all the "patricians" took the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr on Monday. The "commoners" didn't know about Abu Bakr's election yet. They came to the Mosque on Tuesday. All day long they were coming and going in and out of the Mosque, and Abu Bakr was occupied in accepting their assurances of loyalty to him. It was only on Wednesday that he was at last free to give his attention to other matters.

In the meantime, during the entire furious scramble for power in Saqifa, and later, Ali ibn Abi Talib and the members of Banu Hashim, had been busy with the obsequies of Muhammad, the Messenger of God. When the latter had been given a burial, Ali and the Banu Hashim retired to their homes.

Many people in Medina had taken the oath of loyalty to Abu Bakr but there were some who had not. Most important among them all was Ali ibn Abi Talib, the new head of the clan of Banu Hashim. The new khalifa and his advisers believed that it was absolutely essential that Ali should also take the oath of loyalty same as other people. They, therefore, sent for him from his home but he refused to come. His refusal infuriated Umar. A little earlier, he was the king-maker but now he had become the Chief Executioner of the new government of Saqifa. He, therefore, went with an armed escort to enforce the orders of the government, and threatened to burn down the house of the daughter of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, if Ali did not come to the court to take the oath of loyalty to Abu Bakr. Someone pointed out that the house belonged to the daughter of the Prophet, so how could Umar burn it. But Umar said it did not matter if the house belonged to the daughter of the Prophet. What really mattered, he asserted, was the oath of allegiance that Ali had to take.

Edward Gibbon

The Hashemites alone declined the oath of fidelity (to Abu Bakr); and their chief (Ali), in his own house, maintained above six months (sic), a sullen and independent reserve, without listening to the threats of Omar, who attempted to consume with fire the habitation of the daughter of the Apostle. (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

Even a man like Shibli, the biographer of Umar, and one of his greatest admirers, has been compelled to admit that "Umar was a most violent-tempered man, and it is not improbable at all if he made an attempt to set fire to the house of the daughter of the Prophet." (Al-Farooq)

How utterly charming, how utterly sweet, and how utterly heroic of Umar to try to burn down the house of Fatima Zahra! Three days after the death of Muhammad, the Last Messenger of God to mankind, Umar arrived at the door of the house of Fatima Zahra. A gang of other incendiaries was with him, and he demanded Ali's allegiance to Abu Bakr.

This demonstration of "heroism" must have "pleased" God very much, especially, when one remembers that besides Ali and Fatima, there were also present in their house, their four little children – the grandchildren of Muhammad Mustafa. They ranged in ages from two to eight years.

The children must have been "thrilled" to hear the voice of Umar. To them, he must have seemed to be a kind of "Santa Claus," the Santa Claus of the desert, standing at the door of their house with the "gift" of fire for them. His "gift," he might have told them, had the power to change the drab grey walls of their little house into leaping and crackling flames of many hues.

What else could he do for them to "comfort" them and to "cheer them up" after the death of their grandfather, Muhammad, who had loved them so much? Did they ever see a spectacle of "fireworks" so flamboyant as the one he could show them just then if their father, Ali ibn Abi Talib, did not take the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr?

At this time, Zubayr bin al-Awwam was also with Ali. His wife was one of the daughters of Abu Bakr but his mother was Safiya bint Abdul Muttalib, the aunt of Muhammad and Ali. He, therefore, claimed that he was also a member of the clan of Banu Hashim. Umar ordered him to take the oath of loyalty to Abu Bakr. But he refused and threatened to use his sword if pestered too much. Umar shouted to his myrmidons to snatch his sword. They succeeded in overpowering him. He was disarmed, and was taken to the court of his father-in-law. It was in this state that he gave his pledge of loyalty to him.

Umar tried to achieve domination with threats, bluster, and bluff. In the past, one could call his bluff but now it was not possible to do so. With Zubayr thus disposed of, Umar turned his attention to Ali, and he was taken to the court. In the court, Umar repeated his demand for oath but Ali said:

"I am the slave of God and I am the brother of Muhammad, His Messenger. A slave of God cannot become the slave of anyone else. If you have succeeded in capturing the government of Muhammad because you are, as you said, closer to him than the Ansar, then I am his brother, and who among you can claim to be closer to him than myself? All Muslims should give me their allegiance, and not to anyone else. You are robbing the family of your late master of their right. You convinced the Ansar with the argument that the Messenger of God was one of you, and he was not one of them, and they surrendered the khilafat to you. Now I use the same argument - your argument - which you used against the Ansar. We are the heirs of the Messenger of God in his lifetime and after

his death. If you believe in his mission, and if you have accepted Islam sincerely, then do not usurp our rights."

Umar replied to him thus:

"You are a slave of God but you are not a brother of His Messenger. In any case, you will have to take the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr, and we will not release you until you do so."

Ali said:

"O Umar, if you are advocating Abu Bakr's case with such zeal, it is understandable. Today you are making him a king so that tomorrow he would make you a king. I will not do what you are asking me to do, and I will not give him my pledge."

Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah was a member of the "troika," and was, therefore, an ardent advocate of the government of Saqifa. He too made an attempt to persuade Ali to recognize the new government, and to take the oath of loyalty to its head. He said:

"O cousin of the Prophet! you are younger than these men. They are much older than you and they have much more experience than you have. You should take the oath of loyalty to Abu Bakr now, and then, someday, your turn may also come. You deserve to be the chief of the Muslims because of your precedence in Islam, your courage, your intelligence, your knowledge, and your services to Islam. And then you are the son-in-law of our Prophet."

Ali answered him as follows:

"O Muhajireen! do not take the power and the authority of the Messenger of God out of his house into your own houses. By God, succession of Muhammad is our right. He himself made this declaration, and not once but many times. Is there anyone among you who has a better knowledge and understanding of Qur'an than I have? Is there anyone among you who has better knowledge of the practices and sayings of the Messenger of God than I have? Is there anyone among you who can run his government better than I can? If there is, name him, and I will defer to him. But there is not. I alone can give true peace, prosperity and real justice to all Muslims. Therefore do not yield to your temptations, and do not put your own ambitions and desires ahead of the commandments of God

and His Messenger. If you do, you will deviate from Truth, and you will fall into Error."

Bashir bin Saad, the same who was the first Ansari to take the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr in Saqifa, interrupted Ali's speech, and said:

"O Ali! if you had told us all this before, we would not have given our pledge of loyalty to anyone other than you."

Ali said to him:

"Didn't you know all this? What you are suggesting is that just as all of you abandoned the Messenger of God as soon as he died, I too should have abandoned him, and I too should have entered the Saqifa to contest the khailafat with you. This I could not do. Doing so would have been most unworthy of me. I could not forsake the Messenger of God in his death as I did not forsake him in his life."

After these remarks, Ali left the court of Abu Bakr which was held in the Mosque of the Prophet. Such were the mechanics of the election of Abu Bakr as the khalifa of the Muslims – a series of desperate, often convulsive improvisations.

When both the private oath-taking in the outhouse of Saqifa, and the public oath-taking in the Mosque of the Prophet, were over, Abu Bakr, the new khalifa, delivered his inaugural speech. After thanking God and praising Him, he said:

"O Muslims! those of you who worshipped Mohammed, let them know that he is dead; but those of you who worshipped God, let them know that He is Alive, and will never die.

O Muslims! though you have made me your chief, I am not the best among you. If someone else among you had taken charge of this burden which you have put upon me, it would have been better for me. If you expect that I should rule you just as the Apostle of God did, then I must tell you that it is not possible. The Apostle received Wahi (Revelation) from Heaven, and he was infallible whereas I am an ordinary man. I am not better than you. Therefore, if you see me walking on the straight road, follow me; but if you see me deviate from it, reprove me. If I do

right, support me; if I do wrong, correct me. Obey me as long as I obey God and His Apostle. But if you see that I am disobeying them, you too disobey me.

You have the Qur'an with you, and it is complete. God's Apostle has shown you both by precept and example how to conduct yourselves in this life. The strongest among you all is he who fears God. The weakest among you in my sight is he who is sinful. A people that gives up jihad, loses its honor. Be punctual in saying your prayers, and do not miss them. May God have mercy on you, and may He forgive you all."

The new khalifa's speech was little more than some self-deprecating platitudes, a themeless pudding, devoid of uplift or insight. The opening remark, however, was significant. He told Arabs that if they worshipped Muhammad, he was dead! Did any Arabs worship Muhammad? For 23 years, Muhammad, the blessed Messenger of God, was hammering the lesson of Tauheed (Oneness of God) into the heads of the Arabs. If after all that tremendous effort, they started worshipping him instead of worshipping God, then his whole mission as a prophet, must be adjudged a fiasco.

But Muhammad's mission was not a fiasco. The Muslims worshipped God and they did not worship Muhammad. They, in fact, repeated many times every day that Muhammad was a slave and a messenger of God, and Abu Bakr knew it. So why did he find it necessary to tell them that if they worshipped Muhammad, he was dead?

Abu Bakr's remark was a clever ploy. Muhammad Mustafa had just died, and it was natural for Muslims to feel sympathy for the members of his family in their great loss. But Abu Bakr was apprehensive of this sympathy. He considered it dangerous for his own security on the throne. A period of official mourning could also be dangerous for him. He, therefore, equated mourning for the death of Muhammad with "worshipping" Muhammad, and what can be so reprehensible in Islam as "worshipping" Muhammad – a mortal – instead of worshipping God!

Abu Bakr, in this manner, turned the attention of the Muslim umma away from any sympathy it might have felt for the sorrowing family of Muhammad.

The Arabs did not worship anything better than pieces of rock or wood; Muhammad made them worshippers of Allah – the One Creator and Lord of the Universe. The Arabs were little better than shepherds or bandits; Muhammad made them kings and conquerors. The Arabs were barbarous and ignorant; Muhammad made them the most civilized nation on earth. He was the greatest benefactor not only of the Arabs of his own time but of all mankind for all time. When such a man died, the Arabs, the Muslims, who were the beneficiaries of his work for them, ought to have been pulverized by sorrow. But astoundingly, shockingly and incredibly, they were not! Though they had lost the greatest blessing that God had ever sent to them – in the person of His Own Beloved, Muhammad – they didn't register any sense of loss at all.

It didn't occur to the Muslim umma that Muhammad who was its guide, and leader not only in life but also in death, ought to have a state funeral, and that there ought to be a period of official mourning for him.

The Muslim umma apparently figured that mourning for the death of Muhammad, and giving him a burial, were duties that could best be left to the members of his own family. The members of his family mourned for him, and gave him a burial.

Chapter 51

A Critique of Saqifa

Muhammad ibn Ishaq, the biographer of the Prophet of Islam, writes in his Seera (Life of the Messenger of God):

Umar said: "And lo, they (the Ansar) were trying to cut us off from our origin and wrest authority from us. When he (an Ansari) had finished (his speech), I wanted to speak, for I had prepared a speech in my mind which pleased me much. I wanted to produce it before Abu Bakr and I was trying to soften a certain asperity of his; but Abu Bakr said, 'Gently, Umar.' I did not like to anger him and so he spoke. He was a man with more knowledge and dignity than I, and by God, he did not omit a single word which I had thought of and he uttered it in his inimitable way better than I could have done.

He (Abu Bakr) said: 'All the good that you have said about yourselves (the Ansar) is deserved. But the Arabs will recognize authority only in this clan of Quraysh, they being the best of the Arabs in blood and country. I offer you one of these two men: accept which you please.' Thus saying he took hold of my hand and that of Abu Ubayda b. al-Jarrah's… "

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, had not been dead an hour yet when Abu Bakr revived the arrogance of the Times of Ignorance by claiming before the Ansar that the Quraysh, the tribe to which he himself belonged, was "better" than or "superior" to them (the Ansar) "in blood and country!"

How did Abu Bakr know about this "superiority" of the Quraysh? Qur'an and its Bringer, Muhammad, never said that the tribe of Quraysh was superior to anyone or that it had any superiority at all. In fact, it were the Quraysh who were the most die-hard of all the idolaters of

Arabia. They clutched their idols, and they fought against Muhammad and Islam, with cannibalistic fury, for more than twenty years. The Ansar, on the other hand, accepted Islam spontaneously and voluntarily. They entered Islam en bloc and without demur.

The "superiority" of the Quraysh which Abu Bakr flaunted in Saqifa, before the Ansar, was a pre-Islamic theme which he revived to reinforce his claim to khilafat.

Only a few days earlier, Umar had withheld pen, paper and ink from Muhammad when the latter was on his deathbed, and wished to write his will. A will, Umar said, was unnecessary because "the Book of God is sufficient for us." But in Saqifa, he and Abu Bakr forgot that Book, according to which superiority is judged not by blood and country but by piety. In that Book this is what we read:

Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is he who is most righteous of you. (Chapter 49; verse 13)

In the sight of God only those people are superior who have high character, who are God-fearing and who are God-loving. But the one thing to which Abu Bakr and Umar did not advert in Saqifa, was the Book of God. Before entering Saqifa, they had forgotten that the body of the Apostle of God was awaiting burial; and after entering, they forgot the Book of God – a curious "coincidence" of forgetfulness!

Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah

The Qur'an has rejected all superiority on account of language, color of skin or other ineluctable incidences of nature, and recognizes only superiority of individuals as that based on piety. (Introduction to Islam, Kuwait, 1977)

Abu Bakr's claim of the superiority of the Quraysh on the grounds of blood and country, was the first symptom of the recrudescence of paganism in Islam!

Sir John Glubb

On events following the death of the Prophet of Islam.

This wild scene was scarcely over when a man hastened up to Abu Bakr to inform him that the people of Medina were gathering in the guest hall of the Banu Saeda clan, proposing to elect Saad ibn Ubada, shaikh of the Khazraj tribe, as their successor to the Prophet. Mohammed was not dead an hour before the struggle for power threatened to rend Islam into rival factions. The mild and quiet Abu Bakr and the fiery Umar ibn al-Khattab set off in haste to meet this new challenge. They were accompanied by the wise and gentle Abu Ubaida, one of the earliest converts, of whom we shall hear more later.

Ten years before, the Helpers had welcomed the persecuted Prophet into their homes and had given him their protection, but Mohammed had gradually become famous and powerful, and had been surrounded by his own Quraish relatives (sic). The men of Medina, instead of being the protectors, of the Muslims, found themselves in a subordinate position in their own town. Criticism was silenced during the Prophet's lifetime, but he was scarcely dead when the tribes of Aus and Khazraj decided to throw off the yoke of Quraish. "Let them have their own chief," the men of Medina cried. "As for us, we will have a leader from ourselves."Once more Abu Bakr, a frail little man of sixty with a slight stoop, was faced with a scene of excited anarchy. He confronted it with apparent composure. "O men of Medina," he said, "all the good which you have said of yourselves, is deserved. But the Arabs will not accept a leader except from Quraish."

"No! No! That is not true! A chief from us and another from you." The hall was filled with shouting, the issue hung in doubt, the anarchy only increased.

"Not so," replied Abu Bakr firmly. "We are the noblest of the Arabs. Here I offer you the choice of these two, choose to which you will swear allegiance," and he pointed to his two companions, Umar and Abu Ubaida, both Quraishis. (The Great Arab Conquests, 1967)

Sir John Glubb has referred to the "wild scene" which followed immediately at the death of the Apostle. It is true that there was much chaos and confusion. But most of it was engineered by pragmatic necessity. As soon as Abu Bakr arrived on the scene, he convinced everyone that the Apostle was dead, and confusion came to an end. Confusion was kept up as long as it was needed but now it was needed no more.

The Ansar were watching the events. It occurred to them that the refusal of the Muhajireen to accompany the army of Usama to Syria; their refusal to give pen, paper and ink to the Prophet when he was on his deathbed and wanted to write his will; and now the denial of his death, were all parts of a grand strategy to take the caliphate out of his house. They were also convinced that the Muhajireen who were defying the Prophet in his lifetime, would never let Ali succeed him on the throne. They, therefore, decided to choose their own leader.

But the Ansar were outmaneuvered by the Muhajireen. The Ansar did not have an intelligence system working for them but the Muhajireen had. The man who informed Abu Bakr and Umar what the Ansar were doing, was himself an Aussite of Medina. As already pointed out, he squealed on the Khazraj.

Actually this spy met Umar and informed him about the assembly of the Ansar in Saqifa. Abu Bakr was in the chamber of the Prophet. Umar called him out. He came out and both of them sped toward Saqifa. They also took Abu Obaida with them. They formed the "troika" of king-makers.

The Ansar in Saqifa were not conspiring against Abu Bakr or Umar or against anyone else. They were debating a matter that affected Islam and all Muslims. The arrival of the "troika" in their assembly, surprised the Khazraj but pleased the Aussites. The latter now hoped to foil their rivals – the Khazraj – with the help of the "troika."

Sir John Glubb says that Abu Bakr and Umar "set out in haste to meet this new challenge." How is it that Abu Bakr and Umar alone had to meet a challenge that was "threatening" not them but the whole Muslim umma? Who gave them the authority to meet this "challenge?" After all, at this time, they were just like any other member of the community. And how is it that they did not take anyone else into their "confidence" except Abu Obaida as if they were on a secret mission?

The historian further says that the men of Medina found themselves in a subordinate position in their own hometown. It is true but it did not happen in the lifetime of the Prophet. The latter had treated the Ansar as if they were kings, and they had the first place in his heart. But as soon

as he died, everything changed for them, and they ceased to be masters in their own homes.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal:

"How much more exacerbating must this brief outing have been for Muhammad when at the same time he had to confront such momentous matters as Usama's mobilized army and the threatened fate of al-Ansar as well as of the Arab umma, newly cemented together by the religion of Islam?" (The Life of Muhammad)

The underlined part of this question is highly cryptic. It appears that there was a recognition of the threat. Both the Prophet himself and his Ansari friends, had a presentiment of some evil which hung like a cloud over them. But who could threaten the Ansar and for what reason?

In the context of the events, it was plain to see that the only people who could threaten the Ansar were their own erstwhile guests from Makkah – the Muhajireen. No one other than the Muhajireen, in the whole Arabian peninsula, was in a position to pose a threat to the security of the Ansar.

The Aus and the Khazraj were jealous and suspicious of each other. They were, therefore, open to exploitation by their opponents. And since their leaders were aware of this weakness in their ranks, they were on the defensive in Saqifa. And when one of their leaders said to the Muhajireen: "We shall choose two leaders – one from us and one from you," it became obvious that he was speaking from a position of weakness, not strength. Merely by suggesting joint rule, the Ansar had betrayed their own vulnerability to their opponents.

Clausewitz wrote that a country could be subdued by the effects of internal dissension. A party can also be subdued by the same effects. It was essentially the effects of internal dissension which defeated the Ansar. The Ansar had taken the fatal false step. Saad ibn Ubada had warned them that they were revealing their own weakness to their opponents but the harm done could not be reversed especially since the Aussites believed that the Muhajireen would be more even-handed with them than Saad ibn Ubada of the Khazraj.

In the animated, bitter and protracted debate in Saqifa, Abu Bakr told the Ansar, among other things, that the Arabs would not accept a leader who is not from Quraysh. But he would have been closer to the truth if he had said that a non-Qurayshi leader would not be acceptable to himself, to Umar and to a few other Muhajireen. After all, how did he know that the Arabs would not accept the leadership of a non-Qurayshi? Did the Arab tribes send delegations to him to tell him that they would not acknowledge an Ansari as a leader? Abu Bakr lumped all Arabs with a handful of Muhajireen who wanted to capture power for themselves.

John Alden William

The origins of the caliphate-imamate have been the most troubled questions in Islamic history. The majority party, the Sunnis, have left documents that seem to indicate the caliphate came into being suddenly, and as a response to the death of the Prophet in 632. So long as the Prophet lived, he had been the perfect ruler - accessible, humane, fatherly, a warrior and a judge, and "always right" for his people. Now he was unexpectedly dead. Confronted by this loss, and with no successor to him, the Community began to split into its component tribes. By quick action, Abu Bakr and Umar, succeeded in having one of themselves accepted by all as a ruler. A detailed version of the events by Umar, when he in turn was ruler, is as follows:

"I am about to say to you something which God has willed that I should say. He who understands and heeds it, let him take it with him whithersoever he goes. I have heard that someone said, 'If Umar were dead, I would hail so-and-so' (i.e. Ali – Editor). Let no man deceive himself by saying that the acceptance of Abu Bakr was an unpremeditated affair which was (then) ratified. Admittedly it was that, but God averted the evil of it. There is none among you to whom people would devote themselves as they did to Abu Bakr. He who accepts a man as ruler without consulting the Muslims, such acceptance has no validity for either of them … (both) are in danger of being killed. What happened was that when God took away His Apostle, the Ansar (Medinians) opposed us and gathered with their chiefs in the hall (Saqifa) of the Banu Saida; and Ali and Zubayr and their companions withdrew from us (to prepare the Prophet's body for burial – Ed.) while the Muhajireen (emigrants from Mecca) gathered to Abu Bakr.

‘I told Abu Bakr that we should go to our brothers the Ansar in the hall of Banu Saida. In the middle of them was (theirleader) Sa’ad ibn Ubada (who) was ill. Their speaker then continued: We are God’s helpers and the squadron of Islam. You, O Muhajireen, are a family of ours and a company of your people came to settle.

And lo, they were trying to cut us off from our origin (in the Prophet's tribe – Ed.) and wrest authority from us . I wanted to speak, but Abu Bakr said, Gently, Umar. I did not like to anger him so he spoke in his inimitable way better than I could have done. He said, ‘All the good that you have said about yourselves is deserved. But the Arabs will recognize authority only in this clan of Quraysh, they being the best Arabs in blood and country.

I offer you one of these two men: accept which you please. Thus saying he took hold of my hand and that of Abu Ubayda ibn al-Jarrah who (had come with us).'" (Themes of Islamic Civilization, 1971)

By quick action, Dr. Williams says, Abu Bakr and Umar, succeeded in having one of themselves accepted as a ruler. Actually, by quick action, Abu Bakr and Umar succeeded in having both of themselves accepted as rulers. Their quick action also guaranteed that Ali (and the Ansar) would be kept out of the ruling conclave. In Saqifa, power and authority passed into their hands, and there they were to remain. Even after their death, the rulers of the future were going to be men groomed only by themselves. This was the master-stroke of their grand strategy. "Quick action" yielded an astonishingly rich payoff to them!

The keynote of Abu Bakr's speeches in Saqifa was subtlety. It was also one of the secrets of his success. Though he was a candidate for caliphate and was a member of the opposition to the Ansar, he presented himself to them as a disinterested, non-partisan, third party. If he had entered Saqifa as a candidate or as a spokesman for the Muhajireen, the opposition of the Ansar would have stiffened. But he said to them:

"I offer you one of these two men – Umar and Abu Obaida. Acknowledge one of them as your leader."

Abu Bakr praised the Ansar and acknowledged their great services to Islam but above all, by successfully affecting to be uncommitted and

disinterested, he succeeded in disarming them. About the Muhajireen, he said that they had precedence in accepting Islam, and that they belonged to the tribe of the Prophet himself. The Ansar, of course, could not deny these claims. He further strengthened the case of the Muhajireen by quoting before them a tradition of the Prophet in which he was alleged to have said:

"The leaders will be from the Quraysh."

As a quid pro quo for recognizing him as amir (prince, khalifa), Abu Bakr offered to make the Ansar his wazirs (ministers). But this offer was a mere sop to the Ansar. They never became wazirs or advisers or anything in the government of Saqifa.

In recapitulating the events of Saqifa, Umar groused that the Ansar were "trying to cut us off from our origin."

What were those origins from which the Ansar were trying to cut Umar off, and by what means? This statement lacks precision. In point of fact, was it not Umar who was trying to cut the Ansar off from their origins?

From time to time, it appears that Umar suffered a loss of memory. There were times when he forgot the commandments of God as revealed in Al-Qur'an al-Majid, as he himself admitted; and there were also occasions when he forgot the declarations and statements of the Apostle of God. Thus it appears that he had no recollection of two incidents in the life of the Apostle, one connected with the Second Pledge of Aqaba (A.D. 622), and the other connected with the battle of Hunayn (A.D. 630), and both connected with the Ansar.

At the Second Pledge of Aqaba, Abul Haithum of Yathrib (the future Medina), asked Muhammad Mustafa the following question:

"O Messenger of God! what will happen when Islam becomes strong; will you then leave Yathrib and return to Makkah, and make it your capital?"

"Never," was the emphatic reply of the Messenger of God to Abul Haithum and his companions. "From this day, your blood is my blood,

and my blood is your blood. I shall never forsake you, and you and I shall be inseparable," he assured them.

The time came when Islam became strong and viable, and Muhammad Mustafa remembered his pledge to the Ansar. He made Medina – their city – the capital of Islam. Muhammad never told the Muhajireen that his blood was their blood or their blood was his blood. It was, therefore, Umar who was trying to cut the Ansar off from their origins, and not the other way round. The second incident took place immediately after the battle of Hunayn. The Prophet ordered the Ansar to assemble in a tent in Jirana, and when they did, he addressed them as follows:

"… I shall never abandon you. If all mankind went one way, and the men of Medina went the other; verily, I shall go the way of the men of Medina. The Lord be favorable unto them, and bless them, and their sons, and their sons' sons for ever."

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, told the Ansar that he would go their way even if the rest of the world went some other way. In opposing and checkmating the Ansar, one can see which way the Muhajireen went. Muhammad and the Ansar had chosen one direction in which to travel; but in Saqifa, the Muhajireen chose a divergent direction for themselves!

Umar also griped about the "authority" which, he said, the Ansar were trying to "wrest from us." This statement again lacks precision. What "authority" was Umar talking about? And what "authority" did he have anyway? Who gave him the authority that the Ansar were trying to wrest from him? And why did he go into Saqifa? Didn't he go there to wrest authority from the Ansar?

The meeting in the outhouse of Saqifa had only one item on its "agenda," and that was "authority." It were Abu Bakr and Umar who succeeded in grasping that authority. Once it was in his grasp, Umar could afford to become a critic and he could afford to berate the Ansar for trying to cut him off from his "origin," and for trying to wrest "authority" from him.

As noted before, when the Prophet died, Abu Bakr was not present in the Mosque. He was in Sunh, at some distance from Medina. His absence

threw Umar into the greatest agitation. He brandished a sword in the air and threatened to kill anyone who said that the Prophet had died. This near-hysteria was caused by the fear lest the Muslims in the Mosque give bay'ah (the pledge of allegiance) to Ali ibn Abi Talib, and acknowledge him as their ruler. But not knowing when Abu Bakr might come, he turned to Abu Obaida, and said to him:

"O Abu Obaida! hold out your hand, and I will give you my pledge of loyalty so that you will become the amir of the Muslims. I have heard the Apostle of God say that you are the Ameen (trustee) of this umma."

But Abu Obaida refused to accept Umar's pledge of loyalty, and reproached him, saying:

"How on earth, O Umar, can you offer khilafat to me while a man like Abu Bakr is present among us? Have you forgotten that he is the ‘sincere' one, and is the second of the two when both of them were in the cave?'"

Abu Obaida's reply left Umar speechless. He probably became "hysterical" again, threatening to kill anyone who might say that the Apostle was dead, and remained that way until Abu Bakr came. When Abu Bakr came, he (Umar) was at once cured of his "hysteria."

Moments later, the "troika" of Abu Bakr, Umar and Abu Obaida, barged into Saqifa. There Abu Bakr invited the Ansar to give their pledge of loyalty to Abu Obaida (or to Umar).

Within less than an hour, Abu Obaida ibn al-Jarrah, the grave-digger of Medina, had received the offer of the crown of Arabia twice – first from Umar and then from Abu Bakr. He must have been truly a most remarkable man to be courted, not by one, but by two king-makers!

Actually, apart from the fact that he was an early convert to Islam, Abu Obaida had little else to show. About him, the British historian, Sir William Muir, writes in his Life of Mohammed:

"There was nothing in the antecedents of Abu Obaida to sustain a claim to the caliphate. He was simply named by Abu Bakr as being the only other Coreishite present."

Sir William Muir is right in pointing out that there was nothing in the antecedents of Abu Obaida to sustain a claim to the caliphate. But then, what was there in the antecedents of Umar himself to sustain such a claim? When and where did he distinguish himself in service to Islam, either in the field or in the council?

Here the historian is expressing surprise that Abu Bakr could offer the caliphate to Abu Obaida, a man who had nothing in his antecedents. But he probably didn't realize that in the situation under study, the matter of the antecedents of a candidate for caliphate, had no relevance at all. The king-makers would offer the caliphate to any man among the Muhajireen as long as that man was not Ali ibn Abi Talib or any other member of the clan of Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God!

Sir William Muir says that Abu Bakr named Abu Obaida simply because he was the only other Coreishite present. Again he is right. It should, however, be borne in mind that Abu Bakr and Umar were engaged in the most important task of appointing the supreme head of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. One may ask if they could afford to be so casual as they were. And what would have happened if instead of Abu Obaida, another Qurayshi – Abu Sufyan – had been present? Would Abu Bakr have offered the caliphate to him? Most probably, he would have. After all, Abu Sufyan was not only a member of the tribe of Quraysh but also was one of its chiefs which neither Abu Obaida nor Umar nor even he himself was.

Umar and Abu Bakr were going around offering the throne of Arabia to some "eligible" man. But was this throne their personal property which they could bestow upon anyone they happened to like? If it was, then who gave it to them? After all they did not inherit it. If it was not, then what right they had to offer it to anyone? They were going around offering something that was not theirs. If they did not come into its possession by lawful means – by means approved by God – then they were in possession of something they clearly had usurped.

The contest for leadership, after the death of Muhammad, was open only to members of the tribe of Quraysh, and to no other Muslims. Abu Bakr, Umar and Abu Obaida – "the troika" – had made the rules of that contest, and those rules were inflexible. Now the Banu Hashim were also a clan of the Quraysh, and they too had to be excluded from the contest

for power. But how? This posed a problem for the "troika." The "troika" managed to circumvent the problem with the resourcefulness that is essential for survival in the desert. It declared in effect that the clan of Banu Hashim had produced a Prophet for the Arabs – a very great honor for them – and that they ought to be content with it; as for his successors, it would not be in the interests of the umma if Banu Hashim produced them also; therefore clans other than the Banu Hashim ought to produce them.

Who those clans were going to be, it was for the "troika" to decide. The clans to which the members of the "troika" themselves belonged, would, of course, come first.

Thus what proved to be the most valuable asset for the tribe of Quraysh, viz., membership of Muhammad, the Apostle, in it, proved to be a severe "liability" for the Banu Hashim. The latter were "disqualified" from taking part in the contest for power merely because Muhammad belonged to them!

Umar made a 180-degree veer in Saqifa. Before going into Saqifa, he was predicting that if the family which produced the Prophet, were also to produce his successors, the "Arabs" would rebel against it. But when he confronted the Ansar in Saqifa, he prophesied that the "Arabs" would never accept the leadership of a man if he did not belong to the tribe to which the Prophet himself had belonged. He and Abu Bakr laid claim to the caliphate on the ground that both of them were members of the same tribe as Muhammad whereas the Ansar were not.

The late Maulana Abul Ala Maududi of Pakistan has bestowed some extravagant encomiums upon the Quraysh. He says that the members of the tribe of Quraysh were men of extraordinary skills and abilities, and they produced all the leaders of the Muslims. To make his claim convincing, he has quoted statements purporting to their excellence, which he says, were made by the Prophet and Ali ibn Abi Talib.

But it is entirely possible that the Ansar would have produced leaders just as great or in fact even greater than the Quraysh did. But the "troika" blackballed them in Saqifa, and the Muslim umma could never benefit from their talents for leadership.

The authenticity of the statements in praise of the Quraysh which Maududi has attributed to Ali, is open to question. Ali would have found very little to praise in Quraysh. He was not even fourteen years old when they made the first attempt to thwart Muhammad. Ali took up their challenge. His sword was always dripping with their pagan or crypto-pagan blood. He and they were in a state of life-long confrontation with each other.

The Shia Muslims are opposed to the principle of selection of a leader on the basis of assumptions or mere "seniority." According to them, the controlling considerations in choosing a leader must not be his affiliation to the Quraysh or his age; but his character, integrity, competence and experience. Character comes first. How does the leader of the Muslims orient himself toward life – not just to this or that role, not for the moment, but enduringly, comprehensively?

The choice of a leader deserves the most serious investigation reaching far beyond the ethical conduct. After all, the leadership of the Muslims (caliphate) is not the prize in a morality contest. The leader (caliph) must be a man not only of high character and integrity but also of outstanding ability and vast experience. In other words, selection of the best candidate – best in every sense of the term; high in personal integrity but one with ability which has been demonstrated, proven – not once or twice but repeatedly, must be the rule. And of course, he must have that extra but indispensable and yet elusive quality called taqwa.

The electors, if there is such a body, have an obligation for a careful and thorough examination of all the attributes of fitness and personal background of the man who would be a candidate for the highest office in Islam. They must weigh his competence, judgment, independence and philosophical outlook in terms of whether he is the man whom they can conscientiously endorse as the potential caliph.

As we have seen, character and competence of the candidate or candidates for caliphate were not discussed in Saqifa. They were "irrelevant" issues. The rhetoric of the Muhajireen and the Ansar was generated by only one question, viz., should the leader of the Muslims be a Muhajir or an Ansari?

The Ansar conceded defeat in Saqifa when confronted with the sophistry of their opponents, the Muhajireen, that the caliphate of the Muslim umma was the exclusive "right" of the Quraysh because Muhammad himself was a Qurayshi!

Chapter 52

Saqifa and the Logic of History

IN THE INTRODUCTION TO THIS BOOK, I had called attention of the reader to the tendency and the readiness of most of the Orientalists, to accept, at face value, many of the false statements and spurious claims which were put into circulation, long ago, by the historians who were on the "payroll" of the governments of Damascus and Baghdad – both heirs to the government of Saqifa. There is, for example, a consensus among them that Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, did not appoint his own successor nor did he tell the Muslims how they ought to select their leaders for the government which he had founded; and he died leaving everything, apparently, to their resources and discretion.

Some examples of the uncritical acceptance by Orientalists of this claim, were given in Chapter 45. Following is one more example:

"Mohammed died at Medina on June 8, 632, without leaving any instructions for the future government of the Muslim community… "

This statement occurs in the article captioned Caliphate, on page 643, volume 4, 14th edition (1973) of the Encyclopedia Britannia. It is a patent piece of propaganda but the Encyclopedia Britannia, that great disseminator of knowledge, has swallowed the line. It is the most divisive historical canard in Islam, but surprisingly, it goes unchallenged, century after century.

The Orientalists may not challenge this time-honored falsehood but it nevertheless raises some fundamental questions. These questions which relate to the ethos of Islam and the political philosophy of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, are listed below. All of them rest on the premise that Muhammad did not (repeat not) appoint his own successor nor did he

give any instructions to his companions for the future government of the Muslim community. Therefore, when he died, his umma (people) found itself in a state of utter bewilderment.

1. Did Muhammad, the Messenger of God, and the Founder of the Government of Medina, consider himself qualified to appoint his own successor or not?

2. What could be the possible, hypothetical reason(s) for Muhammad's failure to appoint his own successor?

3. Since Muhammad did not appoint his own successor, did he charge the Muslim community with the task of electing or selecting its own leader?

4. Since the Muslim community lacked guidance for the selection of a leader, did the companions of Muhammad, by their common consent, and before appointing a leader (or even after appointing a leader) prepare a set of rules or guidelines to which they adhered (subsequently)?

5. What was the attitude and the conduct of the principal companions of Muhammad toward the leadership of the Muslim community after his death?

6. What was the practice of Muhammad in regard to the selection and appointment of officers?

7. What is Quran's verdict on Muhammad's practice?

8. What did Muhammad actually do about his succession?

9. What actually happened after the death of Muhammad?

10. What importance does the question of succession have in history in general?

An attempt has been made to answer these questions as follows:

Question 1

Did Muhammad, the Messenger of God, and the Founder of the Government of Medina, consider himself qualified to appoint his own successor or not?

Answer

No one would suggest, least of all a Muslim, that Muhammad was not qualified to appoint his own successor. A Muslim cannot imagine that the Apostle lacked the ability to select a successor for himself.

The Arabs were a notoriously arrogant, ignorant, turbulent and lawless breed. Muhammad promulgated the laws of God among them, and he compelled them to respect and to obey those laws. He created a political organization called the State or the Government of Medina. In that State, his powers were unlimited. He chose all its functionaries, civil and military. He could appoint an officer or he could dismiss him, arbitrarily, and without giving any reason(s) to anyone for doing so.

Muhammad's pattern of conduct was consistently consistent. He was, in fact, so consistent that he became almost "predictable." All Muslims knew that he would select and appoint capable men for all key positions, and they also knew that he would do so without consulting them. He did not even delegate authority to any of his companions to appoint officers. Muhammad, the Apostle of God, alone was qualified to select and to appoint his own successor, and no one else could have done it for him.

Question 2

What could be the possible, hypothetical reason or reasons for Muhammad's failure to appoint his own successor?

Answer

If Muhammad died without nominating his heir and successor, he is laid open to the charge of dereliction of duty. Whoever claims that he did not nominate his successor, is suggesting that he launched the frail vessel of Islam on turbulent seas without a compass, without a rudder, without an anchor and without a captain, and left it completely at the mercy of wind and wave. It is to presuppose that he was unmindful of the most vital interests of the Muslim umma, and that he was heedless of the welfare of the generations of Muslims yet to come. Such "heedlessness" on his part could have had three possible reasons, viz.,

(a) All members of the Muslim umma had become intelligent, wise, God-fearing and God-loving; and each of them had acquired perfect knowledge of the interpretation of Qur'an. Also, every individual was equal, in every respect, of every other individual. It was impossible for Satan to tempt or to mislead any of them. Therefore, Muhammad could leave the duty of selecting and appointing his successor to blind chance.

He could take comfort in the thought that whoever was made the leader of the community by the drift of events, would be the right man; and the government of Medina and the community of the faithful, both could be entrusted to his care.

But such was not and could not be the case. It is impossible even for two individuals to be identical in ability, character and temperament. Muhammad knew that all the Arabs who had accepted Islam, were not necessarily sincere Muslims. Among them, there was a very large number of "hypocrites" or "nominal Muslims." Their presence in Medina is attested by Qur'an itself. They professed Islam outwardly but at heart they remained pagans. They were the enemies of Muhammad, of Islam, and of the State he had founded. They constituted a "fifth column" of paganism in Medina, ready to seize the first opportunity to subvert Islam. If Muhammad were to leave the new State without a head, he would, in effect, place in the hands of these ideological saboteurs, the very weapons with which they would destroy it.

Muhammad knew all this, and he died, not suddenly, but after a protracted illness. He had abundant time to attend to the important affairs of State the most important of which was the selection and nomination of his own successor. One thing he could not do, was to abandon his government, which was the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, to the care of some unknown favorite of fortune or some swashbuckling adventurer.

(b) Mohammed did not really love Islam. He was animated only by personal ambition. He wanted to bring the Arabian Peninsula under his control, and Islam was the means through which he succeeded in doing so. But once he realized his ambition he did not care if after his death, the government which he had founded, held together or went to pieces. He did not care if, after his death, the Arabs remained faithful to Islam or they relapsed into idolatry and barbarism.

What can be more absurd than to imagine that Muhammad did not love Islam? In Makkah, he endured torture, hunger, thirst, privation, indignity and exile, all for the sake of Islam. Once in Medina, he was called upon to make even greater sacrifices for Islam. Two of his uncles, three of his cousins, two adopted sons, and one foster brother, and numerous friends were killed in the defense of Islam. In due course, he became the sovereign of Medina but nothing changed in his lifestyle. Many members

of the new community were destitute, and he fed them. He fed them his own food so that quite frequently, he and his children had to go hungry. This went on year after year. He made all these and countless other sacrifices only to make Islam viable and strong.

In Makkah, the Quraysh had offered Muhammad power, wealth and beauty if he would abandon his mission as Prophet of Islam. But he spurned them all. In spurning them, he was spurning "ambition." Perhaps it did not even occur to him that there was such a thing as ambition. The mainspring of his work for Islam was only his love for it. This love sustained him from beginning to end. He did have one "ambition" in life, and that was to see Islam become everlasting. He realized this "ambition" since we know that Islam is everlasting.

(C) Mohammed did not appoint his successor because he was afraid of opposition. Muhammad was an absolute stranger to fear. He challenged paganism at a time when he was all alone in the whole world, and that whole world was seething with hostility toward him. Paganism spent all its power to break him but it failed. He broke it. By dint of personal courage, he triumphed over a whole world. In two out of the five major campaigns of Islam, the Muslims were defeated, and they fled from the battlefield. But he stood firm and did not flee, and in fact, became the rallying point of the fugitives. His presence of mind revived the courage of the Muslims, and they returned to the battle.

After the battle of Hunayn, all Arabia was at the feet of Muhammad, and no tribe or even a coalition of tribes could challenge his power. His power, within the peninsula, was supreme. The question of his being afraid of anyone's opposition, therefore, does not arise.

Question 3

Since Muhammad did not appoint his own successor, did he charge the Muslim community with the task of electing or selecting its own leader?

Answer

The appointment of the Chief Executive of the community of the faithful was an important matter. Muhammad realized its importance. But for

some unknown reason(s), he refrained from appointing him. The only possible reason that he did not appoint him can be that he charged the community with this duty.

But neither Abu Bakr and Umar nor the latter-day Sunni historians, ever made such a claim. They never claimed, for example, that Muhammad Mustafa said:

"O Muslims! I do not wish to appoint my own successor,"

or

"I cannot appoint my own successor,"

or

"I lack the ability to appoint my own successor. Since I lack this ability, I charge you with this responsibility. When I die, you elect or select a leader for yourselves."

No one has ever tried to attribute any such statement to Muhammad Mustafa. Muhammad Mustafa did not give his companions the authority to appoint even a petty official much less the future head of the State of Islam!

Question 4

Since the Muslim community lacked instructions for the selection of a leader, did the companions of Muhammad, by their common consent, and before selecting a leader (or even after selecting a leader) prepare a set of rules or guidelines to which they subsequently adhered?

Answer

The companions of Muhammad did not prepare, at any time, a set of rules to guide them in selecting a leader. In this matter, they adhered to the rule of expediency. First they appointed a leader, and then they formulated a "rule" or a "principle" for his selection. The Muslims "appointed" the first four, the "rightly-guided" caliphs. The appointment of each of them led to the discovery of a new "rule" or a new "principle." These four "principles" were duly incorporated in the political thought of the Muslims.

But soon a new caliph came to power in Syria. His rise led to the discovery of a new "principle" known as "Might is Right." This "principle" made the first four "principles" obsolete. From this time, caliphate was to

be the prize of the candidate who could use brute force more brutally than his opponents. This "principle" has found the most universal acceptance among the Muslims throughout their long history.

Question 5

What was the attitude and conduct of the principal companions of Muhammad toward the leadership of the Muslim community after his death?

Answer

The Sunni Muslims say that Abu Bakr and Umar were the principal companions of Muhammad Mustafa. It were both of them, the principal companions, who seized the government of Medina at a time when Ali and all members of Banu Hashim were busy with his obsequies.

As soon as the Prophet died, his principal companions gathered in the outhouse of Saqifa to claim leadership of the community. This leadership, in their opinion, was so important that they could not pause even to bury their dead master and benefactor. The naked struggle for power erupted within minutes of the death of the Prophet. Zamakhshari, one of the most authoritative Sunni scholars and historians, writes in this connection:

"It was the consensus of all the companions that after the death of the Prophet they had to appoint his successor immediately. They believed that doing so was more important than even to attend the funeral of their master. It was this importance that prompted Abu Bakr and Umar to address the crowd of Muslims. Abu Bakr said: ‘O people, listen to me. Those of you who worshipped Muhammad, let them know that he is dead; but those who worshipped God, let them know that He is alive, and will never die. Since Muhammad is dead, you should now decide who should be your future leader.' They said: ‘You are right; we must have a new leader.' We Sunnis and Mu'tazilis, believe that the community of the Muslims must at no time be without a leader. Sheer logic dictates this. Also, the Apostle of God had enacted laws, and had promulgated orders about the defense of Islam, the defense of Medina and the defense of Arabia. After his death, there ought to be someone to enforce his laws, and to execute his orders."

From the foregoing testimony, it is obvious that the companions of the Prophet realized how important it was for his umma to have a leader. They knew that if there was no one to implement the laws and orders promulgated by him, his umma would fall into disarray.

The situation reeks with irony. The companions were convinced that it was vitally important for the Muslim umma to have a chief executive but there was one man who was not convinced that it was important, and he was Muhammad! After all, if he were, he would have given it a chief executive. He was the only man to whom it did not occur that there ought to be someone to implement the laws and orders which he himself had promulgated.

The principal companions did not attend his funeral. For them, much more important than attending the funeral of their master, was to find a new leader. The problem was quite complex but they "solved" it by appointing one out of themselves, i.e., Abu Bakr, as the new leader of the Muslims.

Two years later, Abu Bakr lay dying. On his deathbed, he appointed Umar his successor, and the leader of the Muslims. In appointing Umar as his successor, he not only knew that he was discharging his most important duty but he was also aware that if he did not, he would be answerable to God for his failure to do so.

"Asma, the wife of Abu Bakr, says that when her husband was on his deathbed, Talha came to see him, and said: ‘O Abu Bakr! you have made Umar the amir of the Muslims, and you know well that he was such a tyrant while you were the khalifa. But now that he will have a free hand, I do not know how he will oppress the Muslims. In a short time you will die, and you will find yourself in the presence of God. At that moment you will have to answer Him for your action. Are you ready with an answer?' Abu Bakr sat up in the bed, and said: ‘O Talha! are you trying to frighten me? Now listen that when I meet my Lord, I will say that I have appointed the best man as the amir of the Muslim umma.'"

Abu Bakr added that his knowledge of and long experience with Umar had convinced him that no one in the Muslim umma could carry

the burden of khilafat as well as he (Umar) could. He was, therefore, confident that his answer would satisfy God.

Abu Bakr knew that he would have to vindicate himself in the Tribunal of God for appointing Umar the ruler of the Muslims. He was convinced that he could not have chosen anyone better than Umar to be his successor. And Talha's anxiety for Abu Bakr's accountability to God, only points up his own conscientiousness about his duty "to command others to do good and to forbid them to do wrong."

Irony again! All companions were idolaters before Muhammad, the blessed Messenger of God, converted them to Islam. Now, as devout Muslims, they were aware that they were answerable to God regarding their obligation to appoint his successor. But curiously, incredibly, there was one man who apparently had no awareness that, some day, he too might have to stand in the Tribunal of God, and be questioned regarding his obligation to appoint his successor. He was Muhammad, God's Own Messenger! Muslims believe that Abu Bakr was ready to defend his action in appointing his successor, with an answer which he knew, would satisfy God. Do they also believe that Muhammad, their Prophet, was ready, to defend his failure to appoint his own successor, with an answer that God would find satisfactory?

After the death of Abu Bakr, his successor, Umar bin al-Khattab, ruled as khalifa for ten years. During the later years of his life, he was often seen engrossed in deep thought. Whenever questioned by his friends what he was thinking about, he said: "I do not know what to do with the umma of Muhammad, and how to appoint an amir who would lead it after my death."

Umar obviously considered appointing his successor a matter of great importance since he was devoting so much of his time and attention to it.

Umar's anxiety regarding the leadership of the umma after his own death, was shared by Ayesha, the widow of the Prophet. Tabari, the historian, reports the following in this connection:

"When Umar was dying, he sent his son to Ayesha seeking her permission to be buried near the Apostle and Abu Bakr. Ayesha said: ‘With the greatest pleasure,' and she added: ‘Give my salam to your father, and tell

him that he must not abandon the Muslims without a leader otherwise there would be chaos after his death.'"

Ayesha was showing great solicitude for the welfare of the Muslims just as she should have. When Umar was dying, she counseled him not to abandon the Muslim umma without a leader, or else, she warned, chaos would follow his death. It is amazing that Ayesha never counseled her own husband to appoint a leader for the Muslims, and she did not warn him that chaos would follow his death if he left them leaderless.

But Ayesha, the daughter of Abu Bakr, had good reasons to be "discreet" with her husband, and did not bring up, for discussion with him, the subject of the appointment of a successor, at any time.

Question 6

What was the practice of Muhammad Mustafa in regard to the selection and appointment of officers?

Answer

During the last ten years of his life, Muhammad organized more than eighty expeditions. He sent out many of them under the command of some officer; others he led in person.

Whenever Muhammad sent out an expedition, he appointed one of his companions as its captain. He ordered the rankers to obey him, and he made him (the captain) answerable to himself. When the expedition returned to Medina, he debriefed the captain. It never so happened that he told the members of an expedition or a reconnaissance party that they had to elect or select their own captain.

In the event when Muhammad was himself leading an expedition out of Medina, he appointed a governor for the city, and made him responsible for maintaining law and order during his own absence. He never told the citizens that in his absence, it was their duty to elect or select a governor for themselves.

In 630 when Muhammad captured Makkah, and incorporated it into the new State, he appointed an administrator for that city, and he did so without consulting either the Makkans or his own companions.

Montgomery Watt

The extent of Muhammad's autocratic powers in his last two or three years is illustrated by his appointment of 'agents' to act on his behalf in various areas, and indeed by the whole matter of administrative appointments. From the beginning Muhammad had appointed men to perform various functions for which he was responsible. Thus he appointed commanders for the expeditions where he was not present in person. Another regular appointment from the earliest times was that of a Deputy in Medina when Muhammad was absent from the city. (Muhammad at Medina, 1966)

Maxime Rodinson

He (the Prophet) either appointed a leader or took command himself. He seems to have had a gift for military as he had for political strategy. He delegated certain of his functions to individuals who acted as his personal agents. Whenever, for example, he left Medina, he used to leave a representative behind him. (Mohammed translated by Anne Carter, 1971)

Such was the policy and practice of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, in selecting and appointing his officers, and there was never a deviation from it at any time.

Question 7

What is Qur'an's verdict on Muhammad's practice?

Answer

According to Qur'an, the actions of Muhammad are the actions of God Himself. The Muslim reader is invited to reflect on the meaning of the following verses (of Qur'an):

When thou threwest (a handful of dust), it was not thy act, but God's. (Chapter 8; verse 17)

Verily those who plight their fealty to thee, do no less than plight their fealty to God; the hand of God is over their hands: then anyone who violates His oath, does so to the harm of his own soul, and anyone who fulfills what he has covenanted with God, - God will soon grant him a great reward.

(Chapter 48; verse 10)

All Muslims believe that whatever Muhammad said or did, was inspired by Heaven. In other words, he was the instrument through which the commandments of Heaven were executed.

As noted before, Muhammad, the Apostle of God, did not share his authority to appoint a governor for a city or a commander for a military expedition, with anyone else. He and he alone exercised it from beginning to end. Much more important than the appointment of a governor or a commander, was the selection and appointment of his own successor, and the future sovereign of the Muslim umma. There was no reason for him to reverse his own policy and practice, and to abandon his whole umma leaderless. His conduct was consistent, and following is the testimony of Qur'an on it:

No change wilt thou find in God's way (of dealing): No turning off wilt thou find in God's way (of dealing). (Chapter 35; verse 43)

(Such has been) the practice (approved) of God already in the past: No change wilt thou find in the practice (approved) of God (Chapter 48; verse 23)

There was no change in the practice of God's Messenger. He did not abandon the Muslims so they would be like sheep without a shepherd. He selected his cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, to be his successor, and the future sovereign of the Muslim umma. He introduced Ali to the umma as its future sovereign, at the Banquet of Dhu'l-'Asheera, just after the first public proclamation of his mission as the Last and the Greatest Messenger of God upon earth.

Question 8

What did Muhammad actually do about his succession?

Answer

Muhammad created a new state – the Islamic State. In creating the Islamic State, his purpose was to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. This he did with the support and collaboration of his cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib. He picked out Ali among all his companions, to succeed him, as head of the Islamic State, and as the Sovereign of all Muslims.

To appoint Ali as his successor, Muhammad did not wait until he had actually created the Islamic State, and had consolidated it as the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. He declared Ali to be his successor at a time when the State did not have any existence. He declared Ali to be his successor at the same time when he declared that God had sent him as His Last Messenger to mankind.

Muhammad designated Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor at the Banquet of Dhu'l-'Asheera in Makkah when the latter was only thirteen years old; and he spent a lifetime in grooming him for the tremendous responsibilities ahead of him.

Twenty years later, in the vast plain of Khumm, near Ghadeer, Muhammad gave finishing touches to his work, and invited his umma, at a mass rally, to meet its future sovereign. In doing so, he complied with a commandment of Heaven enshrined in verse 70 of the fifth chapter of Qur’an; and he fulfilled an obligation toward his umma. His umma had a right to know who would lead it after his (Muhammad's) death.

Muhammad Mustafa did not appoint Ali his successor merely to expound or to interpret the laws of Islam. He appointed Ali his successor to implement and to enforce those laws. In other words, he appointed Ali to run the government of Islam.

If there is a law, there must be someone to enforce it – in the city-state of Medina – as elsewhere. The mere act of passing a law does not mean anything. By itself, a law cannot guarantee the safety, welfare and happiness of man. After a law is enacted, it is necessary also to create executive power to enforce it. If a law cannot be enforced, it is nothing more than a piece of paper. If a government lacks executive authority, it cannot even be called a government. Therefore, when Islam enacted laws, it also created executive authority.

In the time of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, laws were not only expounded and promulgated; they were also implemented and enforced. He implemented and enforced them.

Muhammad appointed Ali to implement the laws of Islam, and to enforce God's ordinances as revealed to him in Qur'an. He appointed Ali to exercise executive authority over the Muslims, after his own death.

Question 9

What actually happened after the death of Muhammad Mustafa?

Answer

After the death of Muhammad Mustafa, the blessed one, the Ansar, gathered in the outhouse of Saqifa to select a leader. Abu Bakr, Umar and Abu Obaida – the three Muhajireen – paid them a visit. They told the Ansar that since Muhammad had not designated his own successor, they had to appoint someone to fill that position. Their action, they said, was not only justified but also was absolutely necessary, if only to save the umma from anarchy and chaos.

The three Muhajireen engaged in an animated debate with the Ansar in Saqifa. The theme of the debate was: 'Should the successor of Muhammad and the ruler of the Muslims be a Muhajir (Makkan) or an Ansari (Medinan).' The fiery orators discussed this theme threadbare.

Although there were some other important issues which were not altogether irrelevant to the debate, such as the wishes of God and His Messenger, the qualifications required in the candidate(s) for the vacant throne of Arabia, and the interests of Islam and the Muslim umma, they were not discussed. These issues were not on the "agenda" of the meeting in Saqifa. The orators, therefore, did not digress from their theme.

Eventually, with skill, patience and ingenuity, the three Muhajireen ironed out the problem, or, rather, they "improvised" a solution to it.

Francesco Gabrieli

At the tumultuous council held in the headquarters of the Banu Saidah in Medina, Omar, almost as a surprise, imposed Abu Bakr as khalifa or successor of the Envoy of God. Like so many events and institutions, the caliphate was born of an improvisation. (The Arabs – A Compact History, 1963)

Caliphate or the leadership of the Muslim umma is the most important political institution in all Islam. In fact, the physical existence of Islam hinges upon the caliph or the leader of the umma. It's, therefore, incredible that it was left to nothing better than an improvisation! It should occasion no surprise that the Muslim world has been repeatedly deluged in blood over the question of succession and leadership. Wars, civil wars, revolutions, conflicts, subversion and anarchy became inevitable when the umma chose improvisation in Saqifa, in preference to the heavenly design and the inspired "blueprint" of Muhammad Mustafa, for an orderly and peaceful transfer of power from himself to his successor.

The protagonists of Saqifa say that Umar's action was prompted by his desire to prevent leadership of the umma from forever becoming the monopoly of one family – specifically, the family of Muhammad Mustafa. They say that such a monopoly of power would have been a "disaster" for Islam. This convoluted argument of the Sunni historians has become a regular latter-day Greek chorus intoning doom. But no one among them has ever explained how.

If after the death of Muhammad, the leadership of the Muslims had become the "monopoly" of his own family, would the Arabs have abjured Islam, and relapsed into idolatry? Or, would the Persians and/or the Romans, have invaded and overrun Arabia, and exterminated all Muslims?

In the perceptions of Abu Bakr and Umar, there was only one way of "saving" the umma of Muhammad from "disaster," and that was by blackballing his family, and by appropriating his government for themselves!

Umar was very anxious that caliphate should not become hereditary in any one family, and that it ought to keep circulating among the Muslims so that "every Arab boy may have the opportunity to become the khalifa." And yet, notwithstanding all the vision and foresight of

Umar, caliphate did become hereditary within sixteen years of his own death. But it became hereditary not in the family of Muhammad but in the family of his arch-enemies – the crypto-pagans of Makkah – the children of Abu Sufyan and Hinda. Thus Umar's foresight did not extend beyond sixteen years unless it was his purpose that caliphate should become hereditary in the house of Abu Sufyan. If it was, then it must be conceded that he was truly remarkable for his foresight.

Abu Bakr and Umar achieved a prodigy of extemporization in Saqifa.

Commenting on the turmoil following the death of Muhammad, and giving his reasons why his cousin, Ali, was blackballed from caliphate, Sir John Glubb writes:

The Arabs have never been willing to pay respect to pomp, rank, or hereditary privileges or titles. (The Great Arab Conquests, 1963)

This analysis, by the historian, of the Arab character, runs counter to the evidence of history. The Seljukes, the Mamlukes and the Ottoman Turks ruled the Arabs for many centuries. The Arabs submitted to them like sheep. They, in fact, accepted the axiom that the Turk was to command, and they (the Arabs) were to obey. No one can tell how much longer the Turkish domination of the Arab lands would have lasted if the British and the French had not put an end to it.

In their total and abject surrender to the Turks, the Arabs were paying respect precisely to "pomp, rank, or hereditary privileges or titles." For many centuries, the Turks ruled the Arab countries with an iron hand, and no one ever heard the faintest murmur of protest from the Arabs.

Actually, the Arabs are no different from any other people including the British, to which the historian himself belongs. If others pay respect to pomp, rank or privileges and titles, Arabs pay respect to them. It is not clear why Sir John Glubb is eager to make so many sacred cows out of the Arabs!

The same writer further says:

"Heredity was never admitted by the Arabs as a sufficient basis for succession. In the selection of ordinary chiefs, the most suitable candidate of the ruling family was normally chosen. In the selection of a khalif,

the most natural choice, and that which in theory was made in the cases of the first four, was that of the most suitable Muslim leader. In practice the difficulty of selecting the best candidate and the resulting danger of civil war often resulted in the use of primogeniture in later Muslim dynasties. The Arabs, however, have never adopted the principle of the automatic succession of the eldest son." (The Great Arab Conquests, 1963)

The historian, it appears, is, once again, at odds with facts. When he says that heredity was never admitted by the Arabs as a sufficient basis for succession, he ought to make it clear, that the Arabs he is referring to, belonged to the generation of the Prophet himself, and not to those which came after it. Within thirty years of the death of the Prophet, the same Arabs were prostrate at the feet of the Syrian khalifa, and they admitted heredity as a sufficient basis for succession without batting an eye. Not only did they acknowledge Yazid, the son of Muawiya, as their lawful khalifa, but for the next 600 years, i.e., until the extinction of the khilafat itself in 1258, they never raised a question regarding the right of the son of a khalifa to succeed his father.

Geoffrey Lewis

With the fifth caliph, the powerful Mu'awiya (661 – 680), the office (caliphate) had become hereditary. His Umayyad dynasty was supplanted by the Abbasids in 750. (Turkey, 1965)

Dr. Hamid-ud-Din

"From the time of Muawiya, the throne of caliphate became the hereditary right of the Umayyads. Every khalifa appointed his own son or some other relative as his successor, and the Muslims meekly acknowledged him as their khalifa, and did not ask any questions." (History of Islam, 1971, page 364, published by Ferozsons Ltd., Karachi and Lahore, Pakistan).

The only Arabs who did not admit heredity as a basis for succession, were the companions of Muhammad himself. Their reason for not admitting heredity as a basis for succession, was pragmatic. If they had admitted heredity as a basis for succession, then there was no way for them to become khalifas.

In the Shia theory of government, heredity is not considered as a basis for succession. According to the Shia theory, the right to designate his own successor, belonged exclusively to Muhammad Mustafa, and not to his companions; and he designated Ali. He did not designate Ali because of propinquity, but because it was the command of God to him to do so.

When the Arabs refused to acknowledge the designation by Muhammad Mustafa of Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor, they were not exactly upholding a "principle." Their refusal was only a gambit to take the locus of power and authority out of the house of Muhammad. Once this "principle" had served its purpose, they – the Arabs – were the first to ditch it.

Laura Veccia Vaglieri

"Towards the end of his reign, Muawiya, using all his diplomatic skill, managed to persuade the notables of the empire to recognize his son Yazid as heir to the throne, leaving untouched the rule that homage must be paid at the moment of succession. In this way he achieved a compromise. Theoretically, the will of the electors was respected, since it was admitted that they could reject the heir appointed by the reigning sovereign (in actual fact, only four or five notables refused to accede to Muawiya's request), but in reality it implied the abolition of the elective system, which had been the cause of so much trouble in the past, and introduced hereditary succession. Muawiya's innovation was followed by all the caliphs who came after him, and enabled the Umayyads to retain power for 90 years, and the Abbasids for five centuries." (Cambridge History of Islam, 1970)

Muawiya junked the "principle" of election which had never been anything more than a farce anyway.

And yet, in all this crooked business of "electing" or "nominating" or "selecting" a ruler for the Muslims, there was one "principle" at work. It was the "principle" of excluding the members of the family of Muhammad Mustafa, the blessed Messenger of God, from the locus of power and authority. Saqifa, in fact, was a monolithic, unified and integrated movement of the principal companions and their proxies to exclude the Banu Hashim from the government of Islam. If there was any consistency either in the deeds of the first three khalifas, or, of the

majority of the companions, or of the Umayyads and the Abbasids, it was in the application of this "principle." On this point, there was consensus among them all. It was the denominator in, and the linchpin of, the planned and coordinated policy of all of them. Even to the dynasties which were to follow the Umayyads and the Abbasids, the Saqifa signals were strong, clear and unmistakable. They faithfully, almost fanatically, toed the line of "policy" formulated in the outhouse of Saqifa. The centerpiece of that policy was blatant antagonism to Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first cousin of Muhammad, and to the Banu Hashim, the clan of Muhammad.

Question 10

What importance does the question of succession have in history in general?

Answer

The question of succession or transfer of power from one incumbent to another, has been one of the most complex and thorny problems of human history. In most cases, the problem has been solved in a no-holds barred struggle, and power has been the prize of the most ruthless of the contenders. The fact that a nation has a constitutional government, is no guarantee that it will be immune to the struggle for power. The struggle of Stalin and Trotsky after the death of Lenin in 1924, and the liquidation of Beria after the death of Stalin in 1953, are two out of many of its examples from current history.

On countless occasions in history, the question of succession has triggered civil war in which countless men and women have perished. Many of us may be tempted to boast that we have outlived that barbaric past in which thousands of men and women were killed before the question was settled who was going to be the ruler. But there is no reason to be complacent. The struggle for power can erupt anywhere anytime just as inevitably in the future as it did in the past. A sub-surface struggle perhaps simmers all the time but it actually comes to a boil when the head of a state dies.

Geoffrey Blainey

"A search for causes common to many wars of the eighteenth century reveals one obvious clue. The death of a king was often the herald of war. The link is embodied in the popular names given to four important wars. Thus there was a War of the Spanish succession, and a war of the Polish succession, and they were followed by wars of the Austrian and then the Bavarian succession. Their names persuasively imply that the question of who should succeed to a vacant throne was the vital cause of the wars.

These four wars of succession were not the only wars which were preceded by and influenced by the death of a monarch. In 1700 the rulers of Saxony, Denmark and Russia went to war against Sweden whose boy ruler, Charles XII, had not long been on the throne. In 1741 Swedish troops invaded Russia whose tsar was one year old. In 1786 the death of Frederick the Great of Prussia prepared the way for the Austro-Russian campaign against Turkey in the following year. And in March 1792 the death of the Emperor Leopold II in Vienna was one of the events that heralded the French Declaration of war against Austria in the following month.

In all eight wars of the 18^{th}-century had been heralded and influenced by the death of a monarch; and those wars constituted most of the major wars of that century. Nor did those death-watch wars entirely vanish after 1800. Thus two wars between Prussia and Denmark were preceded by the death of Danish kings, the American Civil War followed the departure of a president in 1861, the First World War was preceded by the assassination of the Austrian heir." (The Causes of War, 1973)

The struggle for power is a permanent feature of human history. In the past, on many occasions the death of a king was the signal for uprisings in his own country. If he had held the country together with a firm hand, his death was considered to be an opportunity to strike at the central government, and to assert the independence of a dissident region. On other occasions, the death of a king was an invitation to ambitious neighbors to invade his country in the hope that the new ruler, lacking experience, would not be able to offer effective resistance to them, and they would capture new territory for themselves.

The history of the Muslim dynasties is soaked in the blood of the Muslims. In the past, whenever a king or sultan died, his sons and

brothers flew at each other's throats to slit them. Sometimes minors and even infants were not spared if they were in the direct line of descent from the sovereign, and therefore, were potential sources of trouble. At the death of a ruler, outbreak of wars and civil wars, and rebellions in the provinces, were considered normal.

Many modern historians who have studied Islam's political theory and practicability, and have tried to correlate causes and effects, have attributed the intra-Muslim conflicts and wars to the "failure" of Muhammad Mustafa to appoint his own successor. There is a veiled hint or equivocal reflection in their works that he was "responsible" for them. But some other reflections are not so veiled or equivocal.

Edward Jurji

The state of war, existing between the Prophet and his kinsmen, was brought to an end in the total victory of the Islamic forces climaxed by Muhammad's triumphant entry into the city of his birth to destroy the monuments of idolatry. Prophetic though his career remained, Muhammad had increasingly come to wield the sword of a militant ruler and to head the affairs of an aggressive political state, conscious of its role in history. When his death occurred on June 8, 632, he bequeathed to his followers a religio-political heritage ever burdened and harassed for many centuries with the task of finding an acceptable caliph (successor) to fill the highest office in Islam. The caliphate (succession) as an issue, aggravated by the uniform silence of the Prophet on the subject of who was to follow him, became the root of much evil, the chief internal misfortune of Islam, the origin of rifts and schisms, and a sad patrimony of tears and blood. (The Great Religions of the Modern World, 1953)

According to this historian, it was the "uniform silence" of the Prophet on the subject of who was to follow him, which became "the root of much evil, the chief internal misfortune of Islam, the origin of rifts and schisms, and a sad patrimony of tears and blood."

Is this the "legacy" that Muhammad left for his umma? If the modern Muslims still believe the Saqifa myth that Muhammad did not appoint his own successor, then they will have to agree with the judgment of this historian. But if they agree with his judgment, they will have to disagree

with Al-Qur'an al-Majid which has called Muhammad a "mercy for all the worlds."

Sir John Glubb

The Prophet died without leaving any instructions regarding the successor. No sooner was it known that he was dead than the people of Medina gathered together and decided to elect their own chief. Rival claimants to the khilafate were to give rise to endless Muslim civil wars, which might perhaps have been avoided if Mohammed had laid down rules for the succession. (A Short History of the Arab Peoples, 1969)

If the modern Muslims, after reading this verdict of a historian, still insist that their Prophet did not appoint his own successor, then they will have to concede that all the bloody civil wars of their history, were a "gift" to them from him – from him who was the embodiment of mercy. Are wars, especially, civil wars, a curse or a blessing? If they are a curse – and there is no greater curse on the face of earth than wars – would they believe that their Prophet was the Bringer to them of Islam – of Peace?

Actually, one of the aims of Muhammad, as God's Messenger, was to obliterate war, and to restore genuine peace to the world. War is the most unmitigated curse, and peace is one of God's greatest blessings. He was the Apostle of Peace. In fact, the movement which he launched, was itself called peace or Islam. If a Muslim believes that Muhammad was a catalyst of wars and bloodshed, he will cease to be a Muslim.

Now the choice before a Muslim is simple: either he believes that Muhammad did not (repeat not) appoint his own successor, or he believes that he did. If he believes that he (Muhammad) did not, then it would mean that he brought all the sorrows and tragedies of the past and the future upon the Muslim umma. Such a belief would, in fact, be a tacit "indictment" by a Muslim, of Muhammad for his "dereliction" of duty. But he should ask himself if he can "indict" the Last and the Greatest Messenger of God, and still be a Muslim.

If the modern Muslim believes that Muhammad appointed his own successor, then he will have to concede that the meeting held in Saqifa was "ultra vires" because it was held in defiance of the commandments of God and His Apostle. All the evils, the internal misfortunes of Islam,

the rifts and schisms, the sad patrimony of blood and tears, and the endless civil wars of the Muslims, had their origin in Saqifa.

Islam has given freedom of choice to all Muslims. On the one hand they have the inspired judgment of Muhammad; on the other, there is the judgment made in the outhouse of Saqifa. They can choose whichever they like.

Muhammad, the Messenger of God and the Interpreter of Qur’an, was the most knowledgeable of men. Not only he had knowledge of history, and knowledge of the causes of the rise, decline and fall of nations, he also had knowledge and understanding of human nature. The patterns of history were all familiar to him. Because he was endowed with such knowledge, he did not leave the matter of succession to blind chance. He had begun the implementation of the program of the reconstruction of human society, and he had established the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. And he knew that he would not live for ever.

Muhammad knew that he would die but his mission would live. His mission called for continuity. Continuity was all important for the success of his mission, and nothing was to interrupt it, not even his own death. To give continuity to his mission, therefore, he picked out Ali who though young in years, was the personification of all the qualities of leadership in Islam. Muhammad made an inspired declaration in the Banquet of Dhu'l-'Asheera that Ali was his wazir, his vicegerent and his successor. But he had also made a lifelong study and analysis of Ali's character and abilities, and had found him incomparable.

Ali was unique. He was a transcendent character in Islam!

Even if no historical evidence were available that Muhammad appointed his own successor, it is still possible to make a few deductions from his disposition and temperament. He was most meticulous, circumspect and punctilious in private and public life. Prudence, vision and thoughtful planning characterized his work. The allegation that he did not tell his umma who would lead it in war and in peace, and who would guide it in other exigencies of life, is clearly at variance with his character.

Muhammad was the teacher of the Muslims. He taught them everything they knew. Of the knowledge of Islam, he withheld nothing from them. To claim that he withheld from them the information most

vital for them, viz., the name of the person who would steer the vessel of Islam, after his own death, defies all the canons of commonsense and reason.

It will be remembered that when Muhammad Mustafa was in Makkah, the citizens of Makkah, brought their cash and other valuables to him for safe-keeping – both before and after he began to preach Islam because they trusted him. His truthfulness and fidelity were beyond any question.

In A.D. 622 Muhammad Mustafa migrated from Makkah to Medina. Before leaving Makkah, he made Ali responsible for returning all the deposits to their (pagan) owners – the same owners who were lusting to kill him for preaching Islam. But a trust is something sacred, and must be honored by everyone, especially by an Apostle of God!

"Trusts may be expressed or implied. Express trusts are those where property is entrusted or duties are assigned by some one to some other whom he trusts, to carry out either immediately or in specified contingencies, such as death. Implied trusts arise out of power, or position, or opportunity; e.g., a king holds his kingdom on trust from God for his subjects." (A. Yusuf Ali, Translator and Commentator of Al-Qur'an al-Majid).

After Muhammad's departure from Makkah, Ali returned all the deposits to their owners.

But for Muhammad, there was no "trust" greater than Islam. God imposed upon him the duty of delivering this trust to all mankind. Therefore, before his death, he had to make someone responsible to take charge of this "trust."

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, made Ali responsible to take charge of this "trust," and its political expression – the government of Medina.

The best guarantee of the security of the State that Muhammad had founded, was in informing the Muslims who would be their leader after his own death. The security of the State would, in fact, be fatally compromised if he failed to inform his followers who would succeed him as its Chief Executive.

No Muslim would dare to imagine that Muhammad, the Messenger of God, would say or do anything detrimental to the interests of Islam. Nor would any Muslim dare to imagine that Muhammad would say or do anything illogical.

The assumption that Muhammad did not appoint his own successor, and did not introduce him to the Muslim umma, is supported neither by facts nor by logic. Facts and logic are on his side – perennially and inevitably. It was in the outhouse of Saqifa that the logic of history went awry.

Chapter 53

Saad ibn Ubada, the Ansari Candidate for Caliphate

SAAD IBN UBADA WAS THE LEADER OF THE KHAZRAJ TRIBE OF MEDINA. The Khazraj and the Aus, the two tribes of the Ansar, had distinguished themselves by their services to Islam. Their services were acknowledged even by Abu Bakr when he was bickering and dickering with them in Saqifa.

In the battles of Islam, the Ansar were invariably in the forefront. They fought against the combined might of all the idolaters of Arabia. Abu Qatada, an Ansari, claimed with truth that no tribe in all Arabia had produced more martyrs for Islam than the Ansar. More Ansaris were killed in defending Islam than men of any other tribe.

There was a time when Islam was "homeless." No tribe in Arabia offered sanctuary and hospitality to Islam and to its Prophet except the Ansar. They invited Muhammad to be their guest, and they made him the king of their city – Yathrib (Medina).

It was the city of the Ansar that won the honor and the glory of being the cradle and the capital of Islam. It was in their city that Muhammad, the Messenger of God, built the "edifice" of the first and the last Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

In A.D. 623 (2 Hijri), Muhammad led an expedition to Waddan, and he appointed Saad ibn Ubada as governor of Medina during his own absence. Saad, therefore, was the first governor of Medina.

In the battle of Uhud, the Apostle of God gave the banner of the Khazraj to Saad. In the same battle, the Muslims were defeated. With the exception of 14 companions, everyone else fled from the battlefield. Saad

was one of these 14 heroes who fought against the enemy, and defended the Apostle of God.

In the expedition of Mustaliq and in the siege of Medina (the battle of Khandaq), Saad carried the banner of the Ansar.

In 6 Hijri the Apostle went on a campaign and he appointed Saad governor of Medina in his absence.

The Ansar had two leaders, Saad ibn Ubada and Saad ibn Mua'dh. Saad ibn Mua'dh died from a wound he received in the battle of Khandaq. After his death, Saad ibn Ubada was the sole leader of the Ansar.

In Saqifa, the Ansar told Saad that he was the worthiest man to be the khalifa, and they declared their support for his candidacy.

Saad was famous for his generosity. Sometimes he entertained as many as 80 guests. Anyone – friend or stranger, could count on his hospitality.

Saad refused to take the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr. Three years later, he left Medina, went to Syria and settled there. He was in Syria when he was hit by an arrow shot by some unknown person, and he thus died in mysterious circumstances.

Saad ibn Ubada was the first and the last Ansari ever to become a candidate for khilafat. He didn't become a khalifa. In Saqifa, the door of khilafat was slammed in the face of the Ansar, and they were shut out for all time.

Chapter 54

Abu Bakr the first Khalifa of the Muslims

ABU BAKR WAS THE SON OF ABU QAHAFA, and made his living as a merchant in Makkah. He accepted Islam after Khadija, Ali ibn Abi Talib, and Zayd bin Haritha.

It is said that Abu Bakr gave more material support to Muhammad than anyone else. In Makkah, he freed many slaves but there is no evidence that he gave any help to Muhammad. Muhammad, of course, did not want any help from Abu Bakr or from anyone else, but at one time in Makkah, his clan, the Banu Hashim, was in a state of siege for three years, and was in great distress. There is no evidence that Abu Bakr made any attempt to relieve the distress of the beleaguered clan but there is evidence that several unbelievers brought essential supplies to it, and they did so at grave peril to their own lives.

When Muhammad was ready to migrate from Makkah to Yathrib, Abu Bakr offered him a camel. But Muhammad refused to ride the camel without paying its price. First he paid the price of the camel to Abu Bakr, and then he rode it.

Abu Bakr accompanied Muhammad in the journey, and was with him in the cave.

Abu Bakr's daughter, Ayesha, was married to Muhammad, and she was one of his many wives in Medina.

Dr. Montgomery Watt writes in his article on Abu Bakr in the Encyclopedia Britannia, Vol. I, page 54 (1973), as follows:

"Before the Hegira (Mohammed's migration from Mecca to Medina, A.D. 622), he (Abu Bakr) was clearly marked out as second to

Mohammed by the latter's betrothal to his young daughter 'A'isha and by Abu Bakr's being Mohammed's companion on the journey to Medina."

According to this article, these then were the two essential qualifications of Abu Bakr to become the "second" to Muhammad, viz. (1) his daughter was married to Muhammad, and (2) he traveled with Muhammad from Makkah to Medina!

Are the heads of states and leaders of nations chosen on the basis of qualifications like these? If they are, then Abu Bakr had no fewer than sixteen competitors for the throne of Arabia. There were at least sixteen other men whose daughters were married to Muhammad at various times; one of them was Abu Sufyan himself, and two of them were Jews.

The second argument in this article is no less "forceful" than the first. According to this argument, Abu Bakr became the head of the state of Medina because once upon a time he traveled with Muhammad from one city to another – a truly remarkable exercise in "scientific logic."

In Makkah, the Prophet had made Abu Bakr the "brother" of Umar bin al-Khattab; in Medina, he made him the "brother" of Kharja bin Zayd.

At the siege of Khyber, Abu Bakr was given the banner, and he led troops to capture the fortress but without success.

In the campaign of Dhat es-Salasil, Muhammad Mustafa sent Abu Bakr with 200 other ranks under the command of Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah to reinforce the troops of Amr bin Aas. The latter took command of all the troops. Abu Bakr, therefore, served two masters in the same campaign – first Abu Obaida and then Amr bin Aas.

There were many battles and campaigns of Islam but there is no evidence that Abu Bakr ever distinguished himself in any of them.

In the Syrian campaign, the Apostle of God placed Abu Bakr under the command of Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha.

The Apostle never appointed Abu Bakr to any position of authority and responsibility, civil or military. Once he sent him to Makkah as the

leader of a group of pilgrims to conduct the rites of Hajj (pilgrimage). But after Abu Bakr's departure, the Apostle sent Ali ibn Abi Talib to promulgate, in Makkah, the ninth chapter of Al-Qur'an al-Majid (Surah Bara'ah or Immunity), the newly revealed message from Heaven. Abu Bakr was not allowed to promulgate it. Ali promulgated it.

The only other distinction of Abu Bakr was that just before the death of the Apostle, he led the public prayers.

Montgomery Watt

From 622 to 632 he (Abu Bakr) was Mohammed's chief adviser, but had no prominent public functions except that he conducted the pilgrimage to Mecca in 631, and led the public prayers in Medina during Mohammed's last illness. (Encyclopedia Britannia, Vol. I, page 54, 1973)

Some writers have claimed that Abu Bakr belonged to the "first Muslim family." Probably, it means that all members of his family accepted Islam before all members of any other family did. But if the son and the father of a man are members of his family, then this claim cannot but be false. Abu Bakr's son, Abdur Rahman, fought against the Prophet of Islam in the battle of Badr. It is said that when he challenged the Muslims, Abu Bakr himself wanted to engage him in a duel but was not allowed to do so by the Prophet.

Abu Bakr's father, Abu Qahafa, lived in Makkah. He did not accept Islam until Makkah surrendered to the Prophet in A.D. 630. Abu Bakr himself is said to have brought him before the Prophet, and it was only then that he accepted Islam.

The family all members of which accepted Islam before any other family, was the Yasir family. Yasir, his wife, and their son, Ammar, all three accepted Islam simultaneously, and they were among the earliest Muslims.

When Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, died, Abu Bakr (and Umar) did not attend his funeral. They went first to the outhouse of Saqifa, and then to the Great Mosque, to get and to count their votes. In the meantime, Muhammad had been buried.

When Abu Bakr took charge of the government, he did not allow the Muslims to observe a period of mourning at the death of their Prophet. There was neither a state funeral for Muhammad Mustafa, the Last and the Greatest Messenger of God on Earth; nor there was any official or even non-official mourning over his demise. It appeared as if his death and his burial were matters of least importance in the psyche of his own companions.

Chapter 55

Principal Events of the Caliphate of Abu Bakr

The First Civil War in Islam.

As soon as the news of the death of Muhammad Mustafa spread beyond the environs of Medina, false Prophets appeared in many parts of the country. More well-known among them were Musailama in Yamama; Tulaiha Asadi in Nejd; Laqait bin Malik in Oman; and Aswad Ansi in Yemen. Some of them wanted the government of Medina to share its authority with them, and some others wanted "autonomy" in their territories. Abu Bakr sent his troops against them which suppressed them.

Usama's Expedition

As noted earlier, the Prophet had organized, from his deathbed, a new army to attack Syria. He had appointed Usama, a lad of 18, as the general of this army, and he had placed all his companions under his command. His orders to this army were to leave Medina immediately. But the companions did not want to leave Medina, and they did not – until the Prophet died.

But after the death of the Prophet, when Abu Bakr felt secure in the seat of power, he showed great promptness in sending Usama's army to Syria. He said that one thing that he could not do, was to countermand the orders of his late master.

Abu Bakr walked with Usama's army for some distance to acquire "merits" for himself. When he thought he had acquired enough merits, he sought the General's permission to return to the city. He also requested the General to allow Umar to stay with him (with Abu Bakr) in Medina since he would need his advice in running the government.

Usama granted both requests and Abu Bakr and Umar returned to Medina.

At length Usama left Medina and marched toward the north at the head of his army minus Abu Bakr and Umar. But his army had lost its élan. He now perhaps did not know what to do, and returned to Medina after an absence of two months.

Sir John Glubb

In September 632, after two months' absence, Usama returned to Medina with plundered sheep and camels, though few details of his operations have been handed down to us. It appears that he raided Bedouin tribes rather than Byzantine troops. (The Great Arab Conquests, 1963)

Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha, the favorite of Muhammad, and the general of the expedition to Syria, appears soon to have faded out of history; very little is heard about him after he returned from his campaign. He might have taken part in the campaigns of Abu Bakr and Umar in some minor capacity.

Malik ibn Nuweira and the Massacre of his Tribe

Ibn Khalikan, the historian, says that Malik ibn Nuweira was a man of high rank in Arabia. He was a famous cavalier, a knight, a distinguished poet, and a friend of Muhammad Mustafa.

Ibn Hajar Asqalani says in his biography of the companions that when Malik accepted Islam, the Apostle of God appointed him a Revenue Officer for the tribe of Banu Yerbo. He collected taxes from his tribe, and sent them to Medina. But when he heard the news of the death of the Apostle, he stopped collecting taxes, and said to his tribesmen that before making any remittances to Medina, he wanted to know how the new government in the City of the Prophet had taken shape.

Malik did not pay taxes to the new government in Medina, and Abu Bakr sent a punitive force under the command of Khalid bin al-Walid to assert his authority, and to collect the defaulted taxes.

Khalid had a brief meeting with Malik, and the latter knew that he was going to be killed. Some historians say that Khalid was in love with

Malik's wife, and he ordered his execution. Malik turned to his wife, and said: "You are the one to bring death upon me." But Khalid denied this and said: "No. You have become an apostate, and your apostasy is responsible for your death." Though Malik protested that he was a Muslim, Khalid did not listen, and the former was executed.

Abu Qatada Ansari was a companion of the Prophet. He came with Khalid from Medina. He was so shocked at Malik's murder by Khalid that he immediately returned to Medina, and told Abu Bakr that he would not serve under a commander who had killed a Muslim.

After killing Malik ibn Nuweira, Khalid "married" his widow. In Medina, Umar was so scandalized that he demanded, from Abu Bakr, the immediate dismissal of Khalid. He said that Khalid had to be put on trial for the twin crimes of murder and adultery. According to Islamic law, Khalid had to be stoned to death. But Abu Bakr defended Khalid, and said that he had simply made "an error of judgment."

The tribesmen of Banu Yerbo had withheld taxes (zakat) but apart from that they were Muslims in every sense of the term. Abu Qatada himself testified that he heard Adhan (the call to prayer) in the village of Malik, and saw his tribesmen offering congregational prayers. Even so, Khalid ordered his troops to massacre them.

Tabari writes in his History that when Khalid and his troops entered the Banu Yerbo territory, they said to the tribesmen: "We are Muslims." They said: "We are also Muslims." Khalid's men asked: "If you are Muslims, why are you bearing arms? There is no war between us. Lay down your weapons so that we may all offer our prayers."

The tribesmen put down their weapons. But no sooner they had done so, than Khalid's warriors seized them, bound them, and let them to shiver in the cold night. On the following morning, they were all put to death. Khalid then plundered their houses, captured their women and children, and brought them as prisoners of war to Medina.

Sir John Glubb

"Abu Bakr sent Khalid b. Waleed into Nejd with 4000 men. Many clans of Beni Temeem, hastened to visit Khalid but the Beni Yerboa branch of

the tribe, under its chief, Malik ibn Nuweira, hung back. Malik was a chief of some distinction, a warrior, noted for his generosity and a famous poet. Bravery, generosity and poetry were the three qualities most admired among the Arabs. Unwilling perhaps to demean himself by bowing to Khalid, he ordered his followers to scatter and himself apparently moved away across the desert alone with his family. Abu Bakr had given orders that the test to be applied to suspected rebels was that they be asked to repeat the Muslim formula and that they answer the call to prayer. Khalid, however, preferred more aggressive methods and sent out parties of horsemen to round up the fugitives and plunder their property. One such party seized Malik ibn Nuweira and his family and brought them in to Khalid, although they claimed to be Muslims. The men of Medina who were with the army protested vigorously against Khalid's ruthlessness, but without avail. The prisoners were placed under guard but, during the night, Malik ibn Nuweira and his supporters were killed in cold blood. Within 24 hours Khalid had married the widow of his victim.

Malik ibn Nuweira had been executed while professing to be a believer. Indeed Khalid's marriage to the beautiful Leila gave rise to the suspicion that Malik had been killed with the object of making her available to the conqueror.

The men of Medina, who had already opposed Khalid's ruthless actions, were outraged by the death of Malik. A certain Abu Qatada, an erstwhile friend and companion of the Prophet, hastened to Medina to complain to Abu Bakr, who summoned Khalid to answer the accusation. Umar b. Khattab pressed the caliph to deprive Khalid of his command. Khalid returning to Medina, claimed that he had not ordered the execution of Malik, but that his instructions to the guards had been misunderstood. The wise Abu Bakr, whatever he may have thought of the morals of his lieutenant, was aware of his prowess. ‘I will not sheathe a sword which God has drawn for His service,' he exclaimed. Khalid's excuses were accepted." (The Great Arab Conquests, 1963, p. 112)

The tribesmen of Banu Yerbo declared that God is One, and Muhammad is His Messenger, and they said their prayers regularly. They even accepted the principle of paying Zakat, and they were paying it to the Prophet. But they withheld payment of Zakat to the government

of Abu Bakr whereupon he said that they had become apostates, and declared war upon them.

Toeing the official line, the Sunni historians have bracketed all those tribesmen who withheld taxes from the Saqifa government as "apostates." Were they really apostates?

The Muslim jurists have defined "apostasy" as the repudiation of Islam. But failure to say prayers or to fast in Ramadan or to go to Makkah for pilgrimage or to pay zakat (poor tax), is not the repudiation of Islam. A man who does not carry out the mandatory duties imposed by Islam but claims that he is a Muslim, cannot be called an apostate. If one were to become an apostate for missing a prayer or a fast or payment of zakat, then many Muslims of each generation would have to be called apostates. But they are not.

There is no verse in Qur'an calling upon a Muslim government to kill those Muslims who do not pay zakat. There is no tradition of the Prophet of Islam stating that the penalty for refusal to pay zakat is death.

Far from killing the Muslims for their failure to pay zakat, the Prophet actually granted exemption from payment of taxes (zakat), at least in one case. This is what the modern Sunni historian, Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, writes in his book, Introduction to Islam, (Kuwait, 1977):

"… a delegation from Ta'if came to Medinah offering submission. But it requested exemption from prayer, taxes and military service… The prophet consented to concede exemption from payment of taxes and rendering of military service… This act of the Prophet shows that concessions could be given to new converts… "

Here was a new precedent. The Prophet had granted exemption to the residents of Ta'if from payment of taxes. But Abu Bakr did not follow the prophetic precedent; he decided to make a precedent of his own; all men of the tribe of Malik ibn Nuweira were to be killed, and women and children to be made prisoners of war.

Besides Qur'an and Hadith, the Sunni Muslims also acknowledge the authority of "consensus." In fact, consensus in Sunni jurisprudence is such an important principle that it is rated as something almost

infallible. There was consensus of all companions including Umar himself in opposing Abu Bakr's decision to fight against those Muslims who had not paid taxes. But Abu Bakr overrode their consensus and said that if the tribes withheld even that piece of rope with which they tied a calf, out of the share of zakat, he would fight against them, and would take it from them. His orders to his troops were categorical: Exterminate all those people who do not pay zakat.

Abu Bakr's troops carried out his orders. They subjected the Muslim tribesmen to unspeakable horrors, and committed acts of supreme cruelty upon them for withholding the poor-tax.

The so-called "wars of apostasy" fought in the caliphate of Abu Bakr, were actually a civil war – the first in Islam. These wars were fought by Muslims against Muslims – the casus belli in their case being the refusal of some tribes to pay the poor-tax to the government of Abu Bakr.

Abu Bakr began his reign with a civil war but he called it a war of apostasy. When a civil war was given the name of a war of apostasy, it became "respectable" and "holy," and it became the duty of all Muslims to participate in it.

In their anxiety to defend Khalid, many Muslims blandly assert that after the death of the Prophet, Malik and his tribe had become apostates, and the penalty prescribed in Islam for apostasy is death. If their reason for defending Khalid is that he was a companion of the Prophet, then Malik was also a companion of the Prophet. Companionship of the Prophet, therefore, cannot be their reason for defending Khalid. There must be some other reason or reasons. Actually they defended Khalid because he was an instrument of the policy of the Saqifa government. Malik ran afoul of the Saqifa government when he withheld taxes from it. Apart from this, he and his tribesmen were practicing Muslims. But for their "indiscretion" they paid a frightful penalty – they were extirpated!

In the face of overwhelming evidence against Khalid, Abu Bakr was compelled to arraign him but as a grateful master, he defended him, and attributed his crimes to a minor "error of judgment." As a reward for his quickfix exploit, he bestowed upon him the title of "the sword of God," and one year later, when the whole peninsula came under his control, he

(Abu Bakr) appointed him (Khalid) the supreme commander of his armies in Syria.

Such offenses as adultery and the mass murder of Muslims could not only be overlooked as minor "errors of judgment," but could actually be rewarded if their authors lent their blind support to the government of Saqifa.

The "error of judgment" syllogism proved to be a serendipitous discovery for many Muslims. It enabled them to rationalize every crime, and to defend every criminal. In the years to come, they drew a veil over some of the most ghastly acts and egregious deeds in the history of Islam with the explanation that they were only "errors of judgment."

Here one can see an interesting case of the application of the proverbial double-standard. In the caliphate of Abu Bakr, all those Muslims who had withheld the poor-tax, were denounced by him and by the Sunni historians as "apostates," and were put to the sword. But in the caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib, all those people who rose in rebellion against the lawfully constituted authority, and who caused the death of tens of thousands of Muslims, were exonerated and exculpated because they had committed merely an "error of judgment," and they had "repented."

The "error of judgment" was a remarkably expansive blanket!

As noted above, Abu Bakr inaugurated his caliphate with a civil war. But he was able to disguise it as a war of apostasy, and by resolute action, succeeded in crushing all opposition to himself.

Other Conquests of Abu Bakr

The Apostle of God had appointed one Ziad bin Labeed as governor of Hadrmaut and Kinda. When he died, a certain Ash'ath bin Qays rose in rebellion against the government of Medina which now was headed by Abu Bakr. The latter sent his general, Ikrima bin Abu Jahl, to restore his authority in South Arabia. Ikrima defeated Ash'ath, captured him and sent him as a prisoner to Medina. Ash'ath asked for pardon. Abu Bakr not only pardoned him but also gave his sister in marriage to him.

In Bahrain, the tribes of Banu Bakr and Banu Abdul-Qays had refused to pay taxes. Punitive action was taken against them, and they were compelled to pay their taxes.

These campaigns are known in history by the generic name of the "Ridda" wars.

Abu Bakr spent full one year in fighting against the Ahl-er-Ridda and the false Prophets. At year's end all of them had been reduced to submission, and his authority was established in the country. However, at the successful termination of these campaigns, he did not want his troops to be idle; he sent them to invade the neighboring countries of Syria and Persia.

John Alden Williams

"When Abu Bakr was done with the case of those who apostatized, he saw fit to direct his troops against Syria. To this effect, he wrote to the people of Mecca, al-Taif, al-Yaman, and all the Arabs in Nejd and al-Hijaz calling them for a holy war and arousing their desire in it and in the obtainable booty from the Greeks (Byzantines). Accordingly, people including those actuated by greed as well as those (in) hope of divine remuneration, flocked to al-Madina. It is reported on the authority of al-Waqidi that Abu Bakr assigned Amr (ibn al-Aas) to Palestine; Shurahbil (ibn Hasana) and Yazid (ibn Abu Sofyan) to Damascus." (Themes of Islamic Civilization, 1971)

The campaigns against Syria and Persia were begun by Abu Bakr but he died before he could conclude them. They were brought to a successful conclusion by his successor, Umar bin al-Khattab.

Seizure by Abu Bakr of the Estate of Fadak

Fadak was one of the estates acquired by the Prophet of Islam after the conquest of Khyber in 7 A.H. But since his troops did not have to fight for it, and it was surrendered voluntarily to him, it was considered to be the property of God and His Messenger.

As noted before, the Messenger of God made Fadak a gift to his daughter, partly as a recompense for the great sacrifices her mother, Khadija, had made for Islam.

When Abu Bakr took charge of the government of the Muslims, one of his first acts was to take forcible possession of Fadak. He evicted the

agents of Fatima Zahra from her estate, and he also confiscated the property her father had given her in Medina itself.

When Fatima Zahra protested against these seizures, Abu Bakr answered her with a "tradition" of her father. He said that he had heard the Apostle of God saying that the apostles do not have any heirs, and such wealth, property or material goods as they possess in their lifetime, belong, after their death, not to their children, but to the umma (the people).

Fatima said that Fadak was not a bequest of her father; it was a gift. She claimed that Fadak was the private property of the Apostle of God, and it was as his private property that he had given it to her.

Abu Bakr asked if there were any witnesses.

This was truly fantastic. Only four years had passed since the conquest of Khyber. Abu Bakr was not only present at the siege but had also made an abortive attempt to capture the fortress. He had seen with his own eyes what the Apostle had done with Fadak. Now four years later, he was acting as if he did not know anything. According to Bukhari, the collector of Hadith, the following dialogue took place between the plaintiff and the defendant.

Fatima: O Abu Bakr, if your father dies, who will be his heir?
Abu Bakr: I, who am his son.
Fatima: Who is the heir of my father?
Abu Bakr: You, his daughter.
Fatima: If I am his heir, then why have you seized Fadak?
Abu Bakr: I have heard the Apostle of God saying: "We are the group of Prophets, and we do not have any heirs to inherit our property. Whatever property we have, belongs to the umma when we die."
Fatima: But my father bestowed Fadak upon me as a gift during his lifetime, and it has been in my possession all these years.
Abu Bakr: Do you have any witnesses?
Fatima: Ali and Umm Ayman are my witnesses.
Abu Bakr: The testimony of one man and one woman is not enough. There must beeither two men or one man and two women. But since it is not so, the case is dismissed.

The ears Fatima was addressing, were not willing to listen to any argument or reason. The witnesses would have made no difference to those who were resolved not to be convinced. The accused party had one very conclusive argument in its favor, viz., Brute Force! It was an argument that had the power to silence every other argument, and it did.

To support his action in seizing the estate of Fadak, Abu Bakr quoted a "tradition" of the Apostle of God. But it is strange that he alone heard this "tradition." And it's just as strange that Muhammad did not tell members of his own family that they would not inherit his property after his death because he was God's messenger, but he went around whispering "traditions" into the ears of outsiders.

Abu Bakr is the only man in the umma of Muhammad who reported this "tradition" and who set it against the authority of Al-Qur'an al-Majid.

The verdict of Qur'an is as follows:

From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property be small or large, – a determinate share. (Chapter 4; verse 7)

To benefit every one, We have appointed sharers and heirs to property left by parents and relatives. To those, also, to whom your right hand was pledged, give their due portion. For truly God is Witness to all things. (Chapter 4; verse 33)

According to these verses, God has given the children the right to inherit the property left by their parents. Is there any other verse which denies this right to the children of the messengers of God, specifically, to the daughter of Muhammad?

Even if it is assumed that the "tradition" quoted by Abu Bakr is not spurious, and the heirs of Prophets cannot inherit their property, then this "law" ought to apply to the children of all the Prophets, and not just to the daughter of Muhammad. But according to Qur'an, the Prophets of the past had their heirs, and those heirs inherited the property left by their Prophet – fathers.

And Solomon was David's heir. (Chapter 27; verse 16)

Translator's Note to this verse

The point is that Solomon not only inherited his father's kingdom but his spiritual insight and the prophetic office, which do not necessarily go from father to son. A. Yusuf Ali)

At any rate, it was not necessary for Fatima Zahra to bring witnesses. She was already in possession of Fadak. Her ownership of Fadak rested upon a solemn decree or pragmatic sanction of Muhammad Mustafa as the Messenger of God and the Sovereign of all Muslims, and could not be lawfully challenged. The burden of proof that Fatima's possession of the estate was illegal, was on Abu Bakr.

An important point is that the judiciary should be separate from the executive, and the executive should not interfere with the judiciary. But in the case of Fadak, Abu Bakr who was the accused party, was himself the judge and the jury, and his verdict inevitably went against the plaintiff as it would have done in any kangaroo court or star chamber.

The seizure of Fadak was a highly arbitrary act. Not long after Fadak, Abu Bakr was confronted with many new and complex problems. To solve them, he set two important precedents. One was the appointment of the companions as judges. For these positions, he selected men who were noted for their knowledge and sound judgment. If he had been fair, he ought to have referred the case of Fadak to one of his judges for adjudication instead of taking unilateral action on it by seizing it.

The second precedent was consultation with the companions. If Abu Bakr had a difficult problem, he sat in the mosque, summoned the leading companions, and put it before them. After some deliberation, they solved the problem. If Abu Bakr had been fair, he ought to have requested them to give their impartial judgment on Fadak. But he did not do so.

The "tradition" which Abu Bakr quoted as his "reason" for taking possession of Fadak, was actually an ad hoc juridical formulation designed to meet a situation which threatened to compromise his position. It was a "principle" invoked for the first and the last time. Once the crisis had passed, it was given a burial, never again to be exhumed.

In her legal confrontation with the government of Saqifa, over the seizure of Fadak, Fatima Zahra hardly expected any justice. The death of her father, naturally, was the greatest shock and greatest sorrow for her. But some of his companions didn't think that her sorrow was great enough, and they sought to make their own "contribution" to it. It was just when she was in the midst of mourning for her father that Abu Bakr evicted her estate manager from Fadak, and his agents took possession of it.

A long time after the plaintiff and the defendants in the case of the estate of Fadak had left this world, Umar bin Abdul Aziz, the Umayyad caliph, restored it to the heirs of Fatima Zahra. He was pious and God-fearing, and realized that the seizure of Fadak had been an wanton act and an outright usurpation.

The action of the Saqifa government in seizing Fadak had little to do with law or its interpretation. Its leaders were inspired by a single aim, viz., to deprive the children of Muhammad Mustafa of their means of living. Sadaqa was unlawful for them, and they could not accept it. The property which he gave them, was confiscated from them, and their right of inheritance was not recognized.

Ali's Retirement from Public life

After these revolutions, Ali spent most of his time at home where he occupied himself with the task of collecting the verses of Qur'an, and in arranging them in their chronological order. He was thus demonstrating that his duty was to serve Islam regardless of the extraneous circumstances. He often quoted, before his friends, the tradition of the Prophet that the members of his family and Qur'an were his "legacy" to the Muslim umma, and that both of them were inseparable from each other.

No one among the companions was better qualified than Ali to collect the verses of Qur'an. He was one of the few companions of the Prophet who knew Qur'an by heart. Incidentally, Umar bin al-Khattab had spent fourteen years trying to memorize the second chapter of Qur'an (Al-Baqarah), but was unable.

Collecting all the scattered verses of Qur'an in the same order in which they were revealed, was a job that could be done by someone especially tutored by Muhammad Mustafa himself. Such a person was Ali. He had

spent more time with him than anyone else. He had literally grown up with Qur’an. He himself said that there was not a verse in Qur’an about which he did not know when it was revealed, where it was revealed, and why it was revealed. He had the knowledge of the time, the place and the occasion of the revelation of every single verse of Qur’an.

Ali completed the self-imposed task. But unfortunately for Islam, the party in power, in line with its policy, did not want to give recognition to his work. Nothing was more unwelcome to it than to acknowledge Ali's services to Islam. It did not, therefore, "accept" his collection of the verses of Qur’an.

In the days immediately following the death of the Apostle, many people came to see Ali, and some of them counseled him to seize by force what was his by right. Among these people there were a few sincere friends, and also there were many unscrupulous opportunists. They all offered him their support. The latter, of course, offered their support for ulterior reasons. They hoped to kindle war in Islam and to profit by the infighting of the Muslims.

Immediately after the death of the Prophet, his uncle, Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib, called on Ali, and said: "Hold out your hand, and I will give you my pledge of allegiance. This gesture of mine will have a great psychological effect upon the Muslims. They would say that the uncle of the Prophet has given his pledge of loyalty to Ali; we too, therefore, should give him our pledge."

Abbas, of course, was one of the few sincere friends. In another category of Ali's "well-wishers" was Abu Sufyan, the leader of the Banu Umayya, the life-long antagonist of Muhammad, and the symbol of the pagan opposition to and hatred of Islam. In the events following the death of the Prophet, he perceived his opportunity to subvert Islam, and he seized it. He came to Ali and said: "It is outrageous to see men of the humblest clans of Quraysh usurping your right, and capturing the government which is yours. All you have to do to take it from them, is to give me the signal, and I shall fill the streets of Medina with infantry and cavalry, ready to die at your command."

What mortal could have resisted this offer? And what did Ali have to lose now anyway? What he could lose, he had lost. But then who in the

Muslim umma loved Islam more than he did? He never allowed temptation or provocation to make him do anything that would militate against the broader interests of Islam and the Muslims. Islam was still a highly fragile achievement quite capable of being aborted and corrupted by forces inside and outside Medina but in Ali it had a protector who did not let it happen.

If Ali was "the best judge in Islam," he was also the best judge of men. His reply to Abu Sufyan, framed as a question, was characteristic. "Since when you have become a well-wisher of Islam?" asked Ali. It was only a rhetorical question, and with it he spurned Abu Sufyan's offer with the contempt that it deserved, and squelched him.

With this answer, Ali demonstrated once again that he and he alone was the true guardian of Islam. In this fateful moment, he forswore his own interests and ambitions but he saved Islam from shipwreck.

It was a truly critical time in the history of nascent Islam. Rebellions against the government of Abu Bakr were breaking out all over the country. If Ali had accepted the offers of his uncle, Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib, and of Abu Sufyan, he might have succeeded in capturing the government of Medina. But his success would have come only at a cost, to Islam, of a civil war in Medina which was the core of the Muslim state and society. War in Medina at this juncture might have brought the career of Islam to an abrupt end.

Ali passed this test as he had passed many others in life. He did not yield to temptation.

The Society of Cincinnati, formed at the close of the American Revolution by officers who served with Washington, has long maintained ties with those descendants of French officers who served the American cause. The English translation of the Society's motto is: "He relinquished everything to save the nation."

Perhaps even more appropriate would be a motto designed for Ali ibn Abi Talib which might read:

"He relinquished everything to save Islam."

The Death of Fatima Zahra

Ali had sustained two terrible shocks in one day; the first was the death of his friend and benefactor, Muhammad, the Apostle of God. The Apostle's death had put an emphatic end to Ali's and his family's happiness and welfare in this world. The second was the usurpation of his right of succession. The companions had taken caliphate out of his house, and had appropriated it for themselves.

Ali was trying to recover from these two shocks when a third shock came, just as devastating as the first two. About seventy five or ninety five days after the death of the Apostle of God, his beloved daughter, and Ali's wife – Fatima Zahra – also died. Ali was overwhelmed by sorrow at her death. Fatima Zahra was given burial at night, as per her own request. Only the family members knew about her burial and the site of burial. The people of Medina did not know when and where she was buried.

After the death of her father, Fatima Zahra wished nothing more than to be reunited with him in Heaven. Her death was hastened, rather caused, by the series of shocks which came like waves, one after another, following the death of her father. Most of the companions of her father had not attended his funeral; from her funeral they were purposely excluded. She met her father in Heaven, and she found the happiness which had eluded her since his death, once again.

Ali was only 32 years old when the Apostle of God and his daughter died. But after their death, the time still left to him, was like twilight years in which he tried to drown his sorrows in devotion to God and in service to Islam. Notwithstanding his differences and disagreements with the rulers of the times, he never adopted an obstructionist policy. He was ever ready to serve the Muslims. Everything he ever said or did, was calculated to strengthen Islam or to benefit the Muslims. Ali demonstrated over and over again that his love and his hatred, his friendship and his animosity, were for God and for God alone. His attitude toward personalities was invariably impersonal. His love and his hatred were equally impersonal. He loved and he hated – only for the sake of God. He loved those who loved God, and he hated those who disobeyed God.

Abu Bakr's Policy

Abu Bakr and Umar knew that the Arabs had two obsessions: love of plunder and vindictiveness. They skillfully used both these obsessions.

They gave the Arabs a taste of plunder by denouncing those Muslims as apostates who had withheld the payment of taxes to their government. Once the latter were branded as apostates, it became lawful to kill them, to plunder their homes, and to enslave their women and children.

But the eradication of "apostasy" was a small-scale and local affair. To solve their long-term problems, Abu Bakr and Umar hit upon a bolder plan of action. They did not let the victors of the skirmishes and the battles of apostasy return to Medina. Instead, they ordered them to march upon the frontiers of Syria and Persia, and to invade those countries simultaneously. This decision was a stroke of political genius as events were soon to show.

Noldeke

It was certainly good policy to turn the recently subdued tribes of the wilderness towards an external aim in which they might at once satisfy their lust for booty on a grand scale, maintain their warlike feeling and strengthen themselves in their attachment to the new faith. (from the Sketches from Eastern History)

Noldeke would be more correct if he were to modify his statement to read that the tribes "might strengthen themselves in their attachment to the new government of Saqifa," instead of the "new faith." Faith is not strengthened by killing other people and by plundering their homes and cities. But the tribes were certainly strengthened in their attachment to the government of Saqifa which gave them most splendid opportunities to "satisfy their lust for booty on a grand scale."

Geoffrey Blainey

Professor Quincy Wright, who completed in Chicago in 1942 an ambitious study of war, concluded that a major and frequent cause of international war was the aggressive tendency "to indulge in foreign war as a diversion from domestic ills." Wright's argument is more forceful in the current edition of the Encyclopedia Britannia, for which he wrote the article on causes of war: he doubted whether a totalitarian dictatorship could exist without taunting or attacking a foreign scapegoat. (The Causes of War, New York, 1973)

Sir Basil H. Liddell Hart

Dictators make war on some other state as a means of diverting attention from internal conditions and allowing discontent to explode outward. (Why Don't We Learn From History? 1971)

When the Muslim armies attacked the outposts at the frontiers of the Roman and the Persian empires, their discontent exploded outward.

Professor James M. Buchanan

"We must beware the shades of Orwell's ‘1984,' when external enemies are created, real or imaginary, for the purpose of sustaining domestic moral support for the national government." (Quoted by Leonard Silk in the New York Times, October 24, 1986)

A modern Pakistani historian, Dr. Hamid-ud-Din, says that Abu Bakr had very strong reasons for attacking Persia and Rome. In his History he writes:

The Arabs were united under the banner of Islam, and the Persians considered them a perennial danger. The Christian Arab tribes of Iraq often instigated the Persians against the (Muslim) Arabs. (Iraq in those days was part of the Persian Empire). But the Persians were unable to give any attention to the Arabs because of their own civil wars which had ruined their country. Nevertheless, Abu Bakr was convinced that if internal peace returned to Persia, the Persians would attack the Arabs. He was, therefore, always cautious, and never overlooked the principle of "safety first." Skirmishes had already begun between the nomads of Iraq and the Muslim tribe of Wael. Mathanna bin al-Harith, chief of the Wael, went to Medina and sought permission from Abu Bakr to attack Iraq. Khalid bin al-Walid had recently been freed from the campaigns against the apostates in Central Arabia which he had successfully terminated. Abu Bakr appointed him as second-in-command to Mathanna. (History of Islam by Hamid-ud-Din, Ph.D. [Harvard University], Lahore, Pakistan, 1971)

Abu Bakr, apparently, had equally strong reasons for attacking the Romans. Dr. Hamid-ud-Din further writes in his History:

Just like the Persians, the Romans were also afraid of the newly consolidated government of the Arabs. They considered it a threat to themselves. There was, therefore, always the danger of an attack by them on Medina. Abu Bakr was never unmindful of this threat. Therefore, he sent an officer, one Khalid bin Saeed, at the head of a company of soldiers, for the surveillance and reconnaissance of the Roman frontier. It appears that this Khalid was "provoked" into attacking the Romans.

Abu Bakr's generals "pacified" Arabia, collected poor-tax from the tribes which had not paid them earlier, and when nothing was left for them to do at home, they made the first tentative excursions into the Persian and Byzantine (Roman) territory. Minor successes were followed by major victories. A steady stream of gold and silver, of women and slaves, began to pour into Medina. The Muhajireen and the Ansar forgot their debates of right and wrong. They also forgot their mutual jealousies and suspicions. The campaigns in Persia and Syria consolidated the Saqifa government in Medina.

The Aims of the Wars of Abu Bakr and Umar

1. To silence the critics of the Saqifa government, and to put an end to interrogations of all kinds.

2. To convince the Muslims that the policies of the Saqifa government were inspired by true religious zeal.

3. To give the Arabs an opportunity to gratify their lust for plunder. The theory was that once the Arabs tasted the pleasures of conquest and plunder, they would have little time or inclination to ponder moral, ethical or philosophical questions. Their self-interest would take precedence over everything else.

4. To assure the security of the government of Saqifa by all means. Its leaders figured that in the tumult of war and conquest, the Arabs would gradually forget the family of their Prophet, and this would be their real triumph.

5. To give an opportunity to the enemies of the family of Muhammad Mustafa to rise to high positions so that they would buttress the Saqifa power structure.

Though Ali had never challenged Abu Bakr and Umar, they saw his mere presence as a "threat" to their security. To make themselves "secure" they believed that they had to find a new base of power. This they readily found in the family of Abu Sufyan and the other Umayyads of Makkah, and they forged an alliance with them.

Sir John Glubb

The three column commanders (of Abu Bakr in the Syrian campaign) were Amr bin Aas, Shurahbil bin Hasana, and Yezeed bin Abu Sufyan (his father, old Abu Sufyan, the victor of Ohod, and Mohammed's old opponent, had meanwhile been shelved by being given a governorship in the Yemen.(The Great Arab Conquests. 1963)

The Saqifa government appointed Abu Sufyan its governor in Yemen, and his eldest son, Yazid, its general in the Syrian campaign. Yazid's younger brother, Muawiya, was appointed a staff officer, and he accompanied him to Syria.

New possibilities were created for the all but moribund Umayyads, and from their total obscurity in the time of Muhammad Mustafa, they suddenly vaulted to top ranks in the time of Abu Bakr.

Abu Bakr and Umar, both exhibited a powerful tropism toward the Umayyads throughout their reigns. They might have done this for insuring party dominance and integrity. Abu Bakr, it appears, was much impressed by Abu Sufyan and his children. M. Shibli, the historian, has recorded the following incident in his Life of the Prophet:

In the sight of Muhammad, rich and poor, master and slave, white and black, were all equal. Salman, Sohaib and Bilal, all three had been slaves at one time but in his sight, they were in no way inferior to the chiefs of the Quraysh.

One day Salman and Bilal were going somewhere when they came across Abu Sufyan and Abu Bakr. Salman or Bilal (one of the two) said: "Why the edge of the sword has not found the neck of this enemy of God yet?"

Abu Bakr was horrified to hear this remark, and said: "How do you dare to use such language for the lord of the Quraysh?" He then immediately went to see the Prophet and complained to him about what he had heard. But the Prophet said: "I hope that you have not made Salman and Bilal angry. If you have made them angry, then you have made God angry."

Abu Bakr went back to Salman and Bilal, and asked them: "Are you angry with me?" They said: "No. May God forgive you." (Life of the Prophet, Vol. II, Azamgarh, India, 1974)

Dr. Hamid-ud-Din

When Muhammad died, Abu Bakr became khalifa. Abu Bakr was highly conscious of the high status of the Umayyads, and he was very mindful of their honor and glory. He appointed Yazid, the son of Abu Sufyan, the general of an army. At this time, the Umayyads performed such great deeds for the sake of Islam that the people forgot their past hostility to Islam. When Damascus was conquered, Umar bin al-Khattab (who had succeeded Abu Bakr as khalifa) appointed Yazid bin Abu Sufyan its governor. When Yazid died, he (Umar) appointed Muawiya (Yazid's younger brother), as the new governor of Damascus. (History of Islam, Lahore, Pakistan, 1971)

In this appraisal, the historian has interjected a purely subjective note. What great deeds did the Umayyads perform "for the sake of Islam" during the caliphate of Abu Bakr or even of Umar? The Umayyads performed great deeds, i.e., they conquered new lands, but much later, and not for the sake of Islam but for their own sake. And who were the people who forgot the past hostility of the Umayyads to Islam? The people who were the first to forget the Umayyad hostility to Islam were none other than Abu Bakr and Umar themselves!

The alliance of Abu Bakr and Umar with the family of Abu Sufyan and the Umayyads against the family of Muhammad and the Banu Hashim was permanent and unbreakable.

As the spiritual heirs and the "instruments" of the policy of Abu Bakr and Umar, the Umayyads served a period of "apprenticeship" at the end

of which they were ready to claim and to receive their reward. Their reward was the government of Saqifa itself!

This is the story of the rise of the Umayyads to power. It was in this manner that in the words of Gibbon, "the champions of idolatry became the supreme heads of his (Mohammed's) religion and empire," –one of history's most consummate touches of irony.

Abu Bakr's sickness and death

In 13 A.H. (A.D. 634) Abu Bakr fell ill, and when he sensed that he was going to die, he bethought of appointing his own successor.

Abu Bakr called his secretary, Uthman bin Affan, to write his will. When the latter came, he sat up in his bed, and began to dictate to him as follows:

"In the name of God Who is Most Merciful and Beneficent. I, Abu Bakr, successor of the Apostle of God… "

Abu Bakr had gone only as far as this when he had a fainting spell and he lost consciousness. While he was still unconscious, Uthman, his secretary, himself added the words:

"appoint Umar as my successor and your ruler."

When Abu Bakr recovered consciousness, he asked Uthman to read what he had written, and he read:

"I, Abu Bakr, successor of the Apostle of God, appoint Umar as my successor and your ruler."

When Abu Bakr heard this, he was immensely pleased with Uthman. He gave him his blessings, and then went ahead with the rest of the dictation. (Tabari – History, Vol. 4, page 52)

Uthman had no way of knowing if Abu Bakr would ever regain consciousness and would complete the dictation of his will. On his part, he (Uthman) had already forged a document, and he and some others were going to foist it upon the umma – the umma of Muhammad – as Abu Bakr's will and testament!

Though Abu Bakr had many other fainting spells when he was dictating his will, Umar did not shout that he (Abu Bakr) was delirious and was talking nonsense. It was the same Umar who had refused to let the

Apostle of God dictate his will even though the latter did not faint, and did not lose consciousness at any time.

Umar took Abu Bakr's will in his hand, and went around asking people to obey what the khalifa of the Prophet had written in it.

Abu Bakr's election and democracy

Many historians claim that Abu Bakr's election was governed by democratic principles. But such a claim cannot be sustained on the following grounds:

1. When Muhammad Mustafa died, most of the Arabs had accepted Islam. According to the principles of democracy, all of them ought to have taken part in the election of their leader. But if it was not possible to do so, then the chiefs of all the tribes ought to have been consulted in the matter. But if this also was not possible, then the successor of the Prophet ought to have been chosen in his Mosque, in an assembly of all the Muhajireen and the Ansar who were present in Medina. This, very definitely, was possible.

But none of these methods was adopted. What actually happened was that some members of the two tribes of the Ansar, viz., the Aus and the Khazraj, gathered in Saqifa to select their own chief. The spies of Abu Bakr and Umar informed them about the assembly of the Ansar, and they went running to it. On their way they took Abu Obaida ibn al-Jarrah along with them.

Abu Bakr and Umar are touted to be great champions of democracy. If they were, they ought to have told the Ansar to dissolve their meeting in Saqifa, and then to reassemble in the Great Mosque to elect a leader in the presence of all the Muhajireen and all the Ansar. But they did not.

2. Abu Bakr and Umar, in their speeches in Saqifa, acknowledged the services of the Ansar to Islam, but added: "The government which you are eager to seize, was created by Muhammad. Now that he is dead, it should belong only to his heirs, and not to you. We are his heirs. We are Qurayshites same as he was."

In democracy, a basic rule is that a candidate for office runs in an election on the strength of his personal qualifications. He must be qualified

by ability, experience and integrity etc. He does not claim that he is running for office and ought to be elected because he is related to an erstwhile head of state. Yet Abu Bakr told the Ansar that he had a better claim to leadership than they had because he was nearer to the Prophet than they were.

3. In the matter of appointing Umar as his successor, Abu Bakr did not go through the motions of the farce of an election. He went ahead and arbitrarily declared Umar as the next khalifa.

The Sunni Muslims claim that Muhammad, the Messenger of God, did not appoint his own successor, and left his (the successor's) choice to the umma. But Abu Bakr appointed his own successor, and in doing so, he deviated from the practice of the Prophet. If it was a tradition of the Prophet not to appoint his own successor, then Abu Bakr defied it by appointing his own successor. He also defied, at the same time, a tradition of democracy.

Abu Bakr was not alone in repudiating democracy by his deeds. The man most responsible for his (Abu Bakr's) election, viz., Umar bin al-Khattab, himself denounced it. He warned Muslims not to try to find a leader through election again, and said that God had saved them from the pernicious effect of this mode of finding a leader in the case of Abu Bakr.

Abu Bakr died in August 634, and was buried by the side of the Prophet of Islam in his tomb.

Chapter 56

Democracy and the Muslims

MOST MODERN MUSLIMS BELIEVE AND CLAIM THAT GOVERNMENT IN ISLAM is democratic in character. A government run by the Muslims may be democratic in character but an Islamic government is not.

Till the end of World War I, Muslims lived everywhere under the rule of kings and sultans. They called their kings and sultans Zillullah (the Shadow of God), and they were very happy to live in that "shadow" (as if God has a shadow), even though, with rare exceptions, those kings and sultans were the most despotic, autocratic and authoritarian of rulers. They exercised absolute power over their subjects, and could kill anyone who displeased them.

After the World War I, the power of the kings and sultans began to wane. In the changing perceptions of the twentieth century, the kings and sultans became "anachronistic," and the Muslims made the discovery that democracy was Islamic. They began to sing the praises of democracy, and most of them became "converts" to it. Their "conversion" to democracy means that during the first fourteen centuries of its history, Islam was "undemocratic," and it is only sometime after 1919 since when it has become "democratic."

Those Muslims who claim that democracy is Islamic, say that after the death of the Apostle of God, his companions set up the al-Khilafat er-Rashida (the Rightly-Guided Caliphate), and it was the best example of democratic government.

Al-Khilafat er-Rashida lasted only thirty years. After those thirty years, the Islamic democracy was supplanted by absolute monarchy.

That system of government called "Islamic democracy" ceased to exist. Islamic democracy proved to be a highly perishable commodity. It lasted, in fact, less than thirty years – not even a generation!

The Islamic democracy died unclaimed, unmourned and unsung. Who killed it? The pagans? The idolaters? The polytheists? The Magians? The Jews? The Christians? No. The Muslims themselves killed it. And who were the Muslims who killed Islamic democracy? They were not the Muslims of later centuries. They all belonged to the generation of Muhammad Mustafa himself, and all of them were his "companions."

If the program of Islam comprehends the establishment of democracy as the ideal form of government for the Muslims, then what is the position of those saboteurs who destroyed it in its infancy? Islamic democracy was created by the companions of the Prophet but those men who destroyed it, were also his companions. While one group of companions, headed by Abu Bakr and Umar, had founded the institution of Islamic democracy (as claimed by the Sunni Muslims), another group of companions, headed by Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan and Amr bin Aas, had demolished it. A third group of companions, headed by Abdullah bin Umar bin al-Khattab and Abu Hurayra, had witnessed the struggle between Islamic democracy and its grave-diggers. They had been the silent spectators of the death throes of Islamic democracy. When no doubt was left that Muawiya was the "winner," they, being realists and pragmatists, declared that they were with him – with Muawiya – the destroyer of Islamic democracy!

Faris Glubb

Islamic government was completely undermined in the greater part of the Muslim world by the seizure of power by Mu'awiya in 40 A.H. Mu'awiya destroyed the Kingdom of God established by the Prophet and replaced it with a worldly kingdom. He substituted a just and democratic caliphate with a tyrannical hereditary monarchy… (Article captioned "The Islamic Ideal of Ethical Government," published in the Muslim News International, London, March 1963)

Abu Bakr, Umar, Muawiya, Amr bin Aas, Abdullah bin Umar bin al-Khattab, and Abu Hurayra, all were companions of the Prophet of Islam. Abu Bakr and Umar established Islamic democracy; and Muawiya and

Amr bin Aas destroyed it. Does it mean that the builders and the destroyers – both groups – are right, and democracy and absolutist monarchy both are "Islamic?"

We can suspend judgment, at the moment, on "Islamic" democracy but the present-day Sunni jurists and scholars are not willing to extend that courtesy to monarchy as also being "Islamic." According to them, there is no such thing as Islamic monarchy. They are unanimous in billing monarchy as "unIslamic."

G. H. Jansen

The political nature of the Islamic state or order is naturally of primary interest. When engaged in the practical task of drawing up a new constitution for Pakistan that 'would be in consonance with the teachings and history of Islam,' (President) Ayub Khan asked his experts to study Islamic history and the constitutions of other Muslim countries. Two things emerged clearly from this study: There was no place for Kingship in Islam, and succession could not be on a hereditary basis. The community as a whole must have the right to choose its leader and the right to remove him. (This means that all Muslim monarchies, whatever their pretensions to religiosity, have been totally unIslamic). On these two fundamentals there is indeed agreement among our political reformers, but on every other aspect of Islamic policy there are differences of substance and of emphasis. (Militant Islam, New York)

The Ikhwan al-Muslimeen (the Muslim Brotherhood) of Egypt, has indicted all military regimes (dictatorships) also as unIslamic.

G. H. Jansen

The Muslim Brotherhood stressed that no government established by force can be accepted, for consultation is mandatory according to Sura 42 verse 35 of the Koran. Hence military regimes produced by coups are unIslamic. (Militant Islam, New York)

It is, therefore, the consensus of the Sunni scholars of Pakistan and the Sunni spokesmen of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, that monarchy and military regimes both are unIslamic.

But it is a latter-day consensus. The Sunni jurists and scholars of the classical times would not have endorsed this view. Their consensus was entirely different from this. They upheld the supremacy of brute force, as noted before.

And isn't the term "unIslamic" a euphemism for "pagan"? If it is, and if according to the Sunni jurists of Pakistan, monarchy is a pagan institution, then what is their verdict on the monarchs themselves. Can the monarchs run an unIslamic establishment, and still be true Muslims? And what is their verdict on the man who first seized the Right-Guided Caliphate in a coup, and then converted it into monarchy, viz., Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan? He often boasted that he was the first of the kings of the Arabs.

The views of the Sunni jurists of Pakistan and the views of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt on the character of monarchy and military regimes, are shared by Muhammad Asad, a modern, European, Sunni scholar. He writes in his book, State and Government in Islam (1980):

"… let us be clear in our minds on one point at least: there has never existed a truly Islamic state after the time of the Prophet and of the Medina Caliphate headed by the Prophet's immediate successors, the four Right-Guided Caliphs, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali."

According to the foregoing judgment, the Islamic State ceased to be Islamic as soon as Muawiya seized it.

But Muawiya went beyond changing the Right-Guided Caliphate into an unIslamic, i.e., pagan monarchy. He passed on monarchy as his "legacy" to the Muslim umma. The Muslim umma, therefore, has been ruled for all these centuries, by kings, and is saddled with them even today in the 1990s - in countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Morocco.

And yet, the same Muawiya is, for the Sunni Muslims, a "companion and a scribe" of the Prophet, and oh yes, "may God be pleased with him" (for changing Islamic caliphate into a pagan monarchy).

It is perhaps an interesting exercise to ponder if Sunni scholars can see the fallacies in their own logic, and the glaring contradictions in their

own consensus. If they can, then it would be interesting to see how they rationalize them.

Many Muslims look back longingly toward the thirty-year reign of the al-Khulafa-er-Rashidoon (the rightly-guided caliphs) as the "golden age" of Islam. Actually, it was not so golden as it appears to them, or, at best, it was golden for those Muslims who had amassed vast quantities of gold for themselves during those "golden" years.

There were only four of these "rightly-guided" caliphs. Three out of them met violent deaths, two in the midst of civil war. One of them, i.e., Abu Bakr, who was not killed, and who died a natural death, was khalifa for only two years.

G. H. Jansen

Yet another source for legal precedent are the traditions of the Khalifah-al-Rashidun, the 'rightly-guided caliphs,' the first four rulers to succeed Muhammad. They were Abu Bakr, Omar, Osman and Ali, and their four reigns lasted from 632 to 661 A.D. This brief space of twenty-nine years is viewed, nostalgically through the obscuring mists of time, as the 'golden age' of Islam. Why it should be so considered is debatable, for its brevity was because, of the four caliphs, two were assassinated and one was cut down by his enemies, in his home, when reading the Koran. All the divisions that have plagued Islam and the Arab world ever since then, were born during that 'golden' age. It was certainly a glorious age, the period when the Muslim Arabs conquered the whole vast area extending from Tripolitania in the west to the frontiers of India in the east. So the 'traditions' of what these four glorious but ill-fated rulers said and did were added to the growing corpus of Islamic law. (Militant Islam, New York)

Two modern Pakistani historians, Professor Sayed Abdul Qadir and Professor Muhammad Shuja-ud-Deen, have quoted Abul Kalam Azad in their History of Islam (Lahore, Pakistan) in the chapter captioned "The Meaning of Khilafat" as follows:

"There should be a government for the guidance, welfare and happiness of mankind which would give the world deliverance from cruelty, tyranny, oppression and exploitation; and which would restore peace

and security to all so that it may become possible to promulgate the Law of God upon this earth, thereby transforming it into heaven."

There was such a government – the one founded by Muhammad, the Messenger of God (may God bless him and his family), in Medina – which was transforming this earth into heaven by promulgating the Law of God upon it. But its career was interrupted by his death. After his death, new people took charge of his government. But their aims, policy and program were not the same as his, and they, therefore, changed the character of his government.

Muhammad's government was the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, but after his death, it became an "Aristotelian" government.

Chapter 57

Umar bin al-Khattab, the Second Khalifa of the Muslims

IN THE TIMES OF IGNORANCE, Umar made his living as a broker. Shibli, his biographer, says that in his youth he grazed camels.

Before accepting Islam, Umar was one of the most rabid enemies of Muhammad, the Messenger of God.

When Muhammad proclaimed his mission, many people acknowledged him as the Messenger of God. Umar acknowledged him as Messenger of God after six years.

Some historians claim that Umar was a most awe-inspiring man, and when he accepted Islam, the idolaters were gripped with fear for their lives. But this is only a case of a dominant myth being in conflict with ugly facts. When Umar accepted Islam, the idolaters remained where they were, and nothing changed for them; but it was Muhammad who was compelled to leave his home, and had to find sanctuary in a desolate ravine. He spent three years in that ravine, and during those years of exile, his life was exposed to deadly perils every day and every night. During this entire period of more than 1000 days, Umar, like many other Muslims in Makkah, was the silent spectator of the ordeals of his master. He made no attempt to bring those ordeals to an end.

Muhammad Mustafa established brotherhood among Muslims both in Makkah and in Medina. In Makkah, he made Umar the "brother" of Abu Bakr, and in Medina, he made him the "brother" of Utban bin Malik. For his own brother, Muhammad chose Ali ibn Abi Talib in both cities.

In 3 A.H., Umar's daughter, Hafsa, was married to the Apostle.

Umar was one of the fugitives of the battle of Uhud (Baladhuri). He himself said later: "When Muslim were defeated in Uhud, I ran toward the mountain." (Suyuti in al-Durr al-Manthoor).

At the siege of Khyber, Umar made an attempt to capture the fortress but failed.

Umar was one of the fugitives of the battle of Hunayn. Abu Qatada, a companion of the Prophet, says: "In Hunayn when the Muslims were fleeing, I also fled, and I saw Umar with others." (Bukhari and Kitabul-Maghazi).

In 8 A.H. the Apostle sent Umar as a ranker with many others to report for duty to Amr bin Aas, their commanding officer, in the campaign of Dhat es-Salasil.

In 11 A.H. the Apostle of God organized the Syrian expedition and he appointed Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha as its general. He ordered Umar to serve as a ranker in the expedition.

Though Umar spent eighteen years in the company of Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, the latter never appointed him to any position of authority – civil or military.

When the Apostle of God was on his deathbed, he asked the companions to bring pen, paper and ink so he might dictate his will but Umar defied him. He did not let the Apostle dictate his will and testament.

Umar was not present at the funeral of the Prophet of Islam. He was brawling with the Ansar in the outhouse of Saqifa when the body of the Prophet was being buried.

Umar was the khalifa-maker of Abu Bakr. During Abu Bakr's khilafat, Umar was his principal adviser.

The Banu Umayya were the traditional champions of idolatry and the arch-enemies of Muhammad and his clan, the Banu Hashim. Muhammad had broken their power but Umar revived them. The central component of his policy, as head of the government of Saqifa, was the restoration of the Umayyads. He turned over Syria to them as their "fief," and he made them the first family in the empire.

A modern student of history might find claims made on behalf of some companions of the Prophet rather extravagant and baffling. He might notice in them the clash of popular imagination with historical reality. But if he wishes to make a realistic evaluation of the roles they played in the lifetime of the Prophet, there is no better way of doing so than to turn away from rhapsody and rhetoric, and to focus attention on facts and facts alone.

Principal Events of the Caliphate of Umar

When Umar took charge of the caliphate, the Muslim armies were fighting against the Persians in Iraq and the Romans in Syria. The army in Syria was under the command of Khalid bin al-Walid, the favorite general of Abu Bakr. Umar's first act as khalifa was to dismiss him from all his commands, and to appoint Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah as the supreme commander of the Muslim forces in Syria.

Shibli says that Umar had, for a long time, nursed a secret hatred of Khalid because of the latter's excesses. Umar had indeed dismissed Khalid because of his excesses but it appears that personal rancor was also at work. He was jealous of Khalid's fame and popularity. If he disliked Khalid's transgressions, he ought to have formally indicted him, and should have ordered full investigation of his crimes in murdering Malik ibn Nuweira and in appropriating his widow. If Khalid had been proven guilty, then Umar ought to have passed sentence on him according to the Islamic law. But there was no indictment and no investigation. Khalid was summarily dismissed and he died in poverty and obscurity in 21 A.H.

Umar's caliphate is notable for its many conquests. His generals conquered Iraq, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kirman, Seistan, Khurasan, Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Egypt, and incorporated them into the empire of the Muslims. All of these were permanent conquests. The Romans lost Syria, Palestine and Egypt for ever; and in Persia, the Sassani empire ceased to exist.

Among other events of the caliphate of Umar, were the first outbreak of plague in Syria in 18 A.H., and a famine in Hijaz in the same year.

Between them, the plague and the famine killed more than 25,000 people (Suyuti and Abul Fida).

Civil and Military Administration and Policy

Since the empire had grown enormously in all directions, Umar had to establish an administrative system. But the Arabs did not have any experience in administration. Umar, therefore, left the Persian and the Roman framework of administration in the conquered provinces undisturbed. The Persian and the Roman staff carried on the day-to-day work as before.

Umar founded numerous military cantonments in Iraq, Syria and Egypt. Since he wanted the Arabs to be a purely fighting and ruling class, he did not allow them to buy land and to settle down or to become farmers in the conquered territories.

To assess land revenue, Umar again had to retain the Persian and the Romans systems. But in Iraq it was found necessary to survey the arable lands and to assess tax on them. Arabs knew less than nothing about assessing land revenue. There was, however, one exception in Uthman bin Hunaif of Medina. He was a man of outstanding ability as a revenue expert. Though it was Umar's policy not to appoint the citizens of Medina (Ansar) to any important positions, in this particular case he had no choice, and he appointed Uthman bin Hunaif as the commissioner of land development in Iraq. Qadi Yusuf says that Uthman bin Hunaif was an authority in all Arabia on taxation, assessment of land revenue and land reclamation (Kitabul-Kharaj and Siyar-ul-Ansar).

Within less than a year, Uthman bin Hunaif had completed the job of taking measurements of the whole new province, and of making assessments for the collection of land revenue. He was, thus, the first Financial Commissioner of Iraq, and incidentally, one of the few Ansaris to hold any position of authority in the caliphates of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman bin Affan.

When Syria, Jordan and Palestine were conquered, Umar appointed Yazid bin Abu Sufyan the governor of Syria; Shurahbil bin Hasana governor of Jordan, and Amr bin Aas the governor of Palestine. Abu Obaida

bin al-Jarrah was appointed governor of the city of Damascus. When Amr bin Aas conquered Egypt, Umar made him its governor.

Yazid bin Abu Sufyan, the governor of Syria, died in the plague of 18 A.H. When Umar heard the news of his death, he went to see Abu Sufyan to offer condolences to him. But Abu Sufyan interrupted Umar's commiseration, and asked him, "Whom are you going to appoint governor of Syria in place of my late son, Yazid?" Umar said: "Of course, his brother, Muawiya." Abu Sufyan immediately forgot his sorrow at his son's death, and rejoiced in the elevation of Muawiya, his second son, as governor. Umar appointed Muawiya the new governor of Syria. When Abu Obaida died, Umar placed Damascus also under Muawiya's jurisdiction. He fixed his salary at 60,000 pieces of gold a year (Isti'ab, Volume I).

After dismissing Khalid bin al-Walid as supreme commander of the forces in Syria, Umar had appointed him, for a time, governor of the district of Kinnisirin but dismissed him again for his alleged "pomposity."

Saad bin Abi Waqqas, the victor of the battle of Qadsiyya fought against the Persians, was Umar's governor of Iraq. He too was dismissed in 21 A.H.

Amr bin Aas was Umar's governor in Egypt. Umar did not dismiss him but curtailed his powers by appointing Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarah as a "watchdog" over him in fiscal matters.

Umar was a most exacting taskmaster for all his generals and governors. He was quick to lend his ears to any complaint against them, and he was even quicker to dismiss them –with one exception – Muawiya! He was forever indulgent to the sons of Abu Sufyan and the clan of Banu Umayya.

Muawiya, the son of Abu Sufyan and Hinda, the governor of Syria, lived in Damascus in imperial splendor, surrounded by a glittering retinue. It was a lifestyle that Umar did not tolerate in any other governor. But Muawiya, for him, was a "special," and the rules which applied to others, did not apply to him.

Tabari has recorded the following incident in Volume VI of his History. Umar was in Damascus and Muawiya came to see him every day –

mornings and evenings – bedecked in regal outfit, with splendidly caparisoned mounts and escorts. When Umar commented, rather acidly, upon his pageantry, he said that Syria was swarming with Roman spies, and it was necessary to impress them with the "glory" of Islam. His pageantry, he said, was only the outward emblem of that glory - the glory of Islam.

But Umar was not convinced, and remarked: "This is a trap laid by the slick and guileful man."

Muawiya answered: "Then I will do whatever you say, O Commander of the Faithful."

Umar said: "If I raise an objection to anything, you baffle and bewilder me with words. I am at a loss to know what to do."

Here Umar can be seen utterly "helpless" before his own protégé. He could condone Muawiya anything and everything. He, in fact, appeared to be ostentatiously courting Abu Sufyan and his sons. Once he placed them at the helm of affairs, they consolidated their position, and it became impossible to dislodge them. It was in this manner that the secular, predatory, imperialist and economically exploitative Umayyads were foisted upon the Muslims. The cultivation of the Umayyads, it appears, was one of the constants in Saqifa's policy equation.

Some Reflections on the Conquests of the Arabs

Umar's generals had conquered Persia, Syria and Egypt. His successors in the Umayyad dynasty pushed those conquests as far as southern France in the west, and the western frontiers of China and the Indus valley in the east. The students of history have expressed amazement at the speed and the extent of the conquests of the Arabs in the seventh/eighth centuries. They achieved all those conquests within 100 years – truly one of the most remarkable series of conquests in world history.

Many centuries later, the search goes on for the answer to the question: How did the Arabs conquer so much so soon? Many reasons have been given by the historians for the success of the Arab arms, among them: civil war and anarchy in Persia; a war between Persia and Rome that lasted for 26 years, and which left both empires utterly exhausted, bleeding and prostrate; the disgruntlement of the Roman subjects in Syria and Egypt who welcomed the Arabs as liberators, and the loss to Rome of the

"umbrella" of local support; the dependence both of the Persians and the Romans upon mercenaries and conscripts who lacked morale; persecution on grounds of religion of dissident sects and creeds by both the Persians and the Romans; and the enormous burden of taxes that the alien races ruled by Persia and Rome, and the peasants in both empires, had to carry. Also, the Persians and the Romans were handicapped by heavy baggage, and they lacked mobility. The Arabs, on the other hands, were highly mobile. They could strike at a target of their choice, and then retreat into the desert on their swift camels where the enemy cavalry could not enter as it did not have logistical support.

In their campaigns, the Arabs were invariably outnumbered by their enemies but this was not necessarily a handicap for them. History abounds in examples of small forces of volunteers standing up to and defeating large conscript armies.

But the Muslims themselves, discount most of these reasons for their success. According to many of them, the secret of their success was in the piety and the religious zeal of the Muslim soldiers. The propulsive power behind the Arab conquests of the seventh century, they say, came from Islam, and every Arab who left the peninsula to attack the Fertile Crescent, was a mujahid or a holy warrior, fighting for the glory of God.

This claim, however, is only partly true. Without a doubt there were those Muslims who wished to spread the light of Islam in the world but also there were others, and they were the overwhelming majority, who fought for the material rewards that the conquests promised to bring to them. They had developed a distinctly secular appetite for power and riches.

Joel Carmichael

The predominant incentives that drove the Bedouin out of the peninsula were bodily hunger and greed, natural consequences of the straitened circumstances there and of the endless opportunities for enrichment offered by the cultivated societies they overran. Thus, though there were doubtless also men who "killed for the sake of the hereafter," the masses of tribesmen surely "killed for earthly lust."

The otherworldly aspects of Mohammed's preaching were completely eclipsed during the conquests by the incredible booty that could be won: thus a Qurayshite notable, who was considered so pious that he was one of the ten men to whom Mohammed could give his personal word during their lifetime that they would get into paradise because of their zeal for Islam, left behind an estate whose net worth seems to have been between 35 and 52 million dirhems; he had eleven houses in Medina alone, as well as others in Basra, Kufa, Fustat and Alexandria. Another of these ten pious men personally promised paradise by Mohammed owned real property in the amount of 30 million dirhems; on his death his steward had over two million dirhems in cash.

Once this process is seen in perspective, it becomes clear how remarkably obtuse is the old, traditional conception of the Arab expansion as being a pietist movement aroused by Mohammed's personal religious zeal.

… there seems to be no doubt that the last thing the Muslim Arabs were thinking of was converting anyone. More particularly, the pietism that was to become the hallmark of later Islam, at least in certain of its manifestations, was utterly alien to the initial Arab conquerors.

It has been pointed out, the driving force behind the Muslim Arab conquests was not religious in the least, but a migratory impulse rooted in the millennial condition of the Arabian peninsula. Men like Khalid and Amr (bin Aas), for instance, were obviously no pietists or mystics; their interests were thoroughly practical.

The switching over of the Meccan aristocracy to the side of the Muslims is a telling illustration of the swift and irresistible injection of purely secular elements into the earliest enterprises of the Umma, which though formulated on the basis of religion, was articulated on the basis of politics. (The Shaping of the Arabs, New York, 1967)

It is true that religion was the factor that propelled the Muslims out of Arabia; but once it had done so, it did not play any significant role in the conquests that followed. Its role was catalytic in the eruption of the Arabs. If religion and piety were the cause of the success of the Muslims in their campaigns, then how would one explain the success of the nations which were not Muslim? Some of those nations were the enemies

of Islam yet they were, at one time, triumphant on a scale that matched, and sometimes surpassed, the conquests of the Muslims.

The conquests of the Arabs were astounding in their vastness but they were not, by any means, unique.

Almost one thousand years before the rise of Islam, Alexander the Great, a young Macedonian, conquered, within ten years, all the lands from the Balkan peninsula to the frontiers of China, and from Libya to the Punjab in India. He was a polytheist. Wherever he went, he worshipped the local gods. He worshipped Zeus in Greece, Ammon-Re in Libya; Marduk in Babylon; and Ahura in Persepolis. His conquests were not inspired by any religion. In fact, religion did not figure anywhere in his conquests. If he had not died at 32, he would have conquered the rest of the world.

After the ancient Greeks, the Romans were the greatest conquerors and administrators. They built one of the greatest and most powerful empires of history, and one that lasted longer than any other empire before or since. Like the Greeks before them, they too were worshippers of idols, though the Eastern Roman Empire was converted to Christianity in early fifth century A.D.

In the thirteenth century, the Mongols, led by Genghiz Khan, shook the whole earth. They were the most dangerous enemies that Islam ever met. All of Asia was at their feet, and they came within an ace of blotting out Islam in that continent. Their conquests were more rapid and on an even grander scale than the conquests of the Arabs. Within fifty years, they had conquered all of China, all of Russia, all of Central and Western Asia, and had penetrated into Europe as far as Hungary. While the Muslims in their career of conquest, were defeated at Tours in the West, and at Constantinople in the East, the Mongols were consistently victorious everywhere. They retreated from Central Europe only because of the death, in distant Karakorum, of their Great Khan.

The Mongols did not have any religion at all. What was it that launched them on the career of world conquest? Certainly not religious zeal and piety.

In the 16th century, the Castilian Conquistadores put Spain in the front rank of the nations of the world. A mere handful of them left the shores of Spain, and conquered the whole new world. They laid two continents at the feet of the king of Spain. It is true that they were inspired by religious zeal even though they did not have much piety – but it was Catholic zeal. Their zeal was not so much unIslamic as it was anti-Islamic. Just before discovering and conquering the Americas, they had defeated the Muslims of Granada in 1492, had expelled them from Spain, and had obliterated every vestige of Islamic culture from the Iberian peninsula.

In the 17th century, the Dutch rode the crest of glory. Their story of that epoch reads like a saga of great and heroic deeds. At home they had been locked up in a deadly struggle against two enemies – the Spaniards and the sea, and they had overcome both. They had expelled the Spaniards from the Netherlands, and they had tamed the wild and the rampaging North Sea.

Having conquered these two enemies, the Dutch looked outward for new worlds to conquer. The dynamics of war against Spain and the North Sea, gave them a momentum of victory and success that carried them around the world. In an outburst of energy, the Dutch girdled the earth, conquering, colonizing and building.

The Dutch were not only good sailors and navigators; they were also good merchants and colonizers. They built factories in India, and they founded colonies in North and South America, and in South Africa. Their colony in South Africa became one of the most successful in the history of settlement and colonization in the whole world.

The Dutch were empire-builders too. Twelve thousand miles away from home, they conquered the East Indies which was much the richest of all the empires of the Age of Imperialism, and they held it for 350 years.

And yet, in their Golden Age, the 17th century, the Dutch were so few in number. But as few as they were, their quality was superb. They did not allow lack of numbers to put a crimp upon what they could accomplish, proving in this manner that there is no correlation between large numbers and achievement.

It's a most remarkable record of achievement for such a small nation as the Dutch. They also proved that there is not, necessarily, a correlation between religion and achievement. Centuries before the dawn of their greatness, the Dutch had been devout Christians but it was only in the 17th century that their dizzying and dazzling rise began.

In the 19th century, the British carved out an empire for themselves over which the sun never set. In North America, they ruled the northern half of the continent; in Africa, their empire extended from Alexandria in the north to Cape Town in the south; and in South Asia, they conquered from Kabul to Rangoon. They colonized Australia and New Zealand. They established Pax Britannia over all this immense area, one-fourth of the earth.

In the 18th century when the British were building their empire, they had only 35,000 men in arms, and 7,500 out of them were busy in pacifying Ireland.

While the Royal Navy held the British Empire together, their merchant marine built another - an invisible empire. It was their commercial empire which comprehended many of those countries which were out of the orbit of their political power.

At one time, when the power of the British was at its zenith, no nation on earth could challenge them on land or on sea.

Concurrently, with the extension of their political power and commercial influence, the British also established their cultural hegemony. They spread the English language over most of the world so that it is spoken or it is understood in most of the countries of the world.

The British accomplished all this and much more but not because of their piety and religious zeal. They were only tepidly interested in religion. They did not conquer an inch of foreign territory for the sake of Christ or the Bible; they conquered only for Britain, and to build the British Empire.

The old imperial system of Britain, France and the Netherlands held the world in an iron grip for nearly two centuries. Muslim states everywhere were at the feet of these powers. But in the aftermath of the two

World Wars, their empires broke down. From the debris of their empires rose a multitude of new nations. One of these new nations was the Zionist State of Israel.

On May 14, 1948, the British relinquished their mandate over Palestine, and the Jewish settlers of the country proclaimed the birth of the State of Israel. On the following day (May 15) five Arab states invaded Israel with the avowed intention of "pushing Israel into the sea." But they could not push Israel into the sea. Israel defeated them all, and they had to retreat into their own shells.

Since then, there have been other wars between the Arabs and Israel. There was one in 1956 and another in 1967. In both wars, Israel defeated the Arabs, and captured much territory from them including Old Jerusalem.

In August 1969, a part of the Masjid-ul-Aqsa in Jerusalem caught fire. It was an act of arson. All Muslims – Arab as well as non-Arab – were inflamed at this outrage. The shock waves of the incident reached the remotest corners of the Muslim world, the two ends of which are 10,000 miles apart – from Indonesia in the east to Mauritania in the west. The Muslim nations held a conference in Rabat(Morocco) to consider some action to recover Jerusalem from Israel. But all they did, was pass resolutions and denounce Israel. An insolent Israel dared and defied the vast, sprawling Muslim world, but the latter lacked the grit and the gumption to take up the challenge.

In October 1973, Egypt attacked Israel on Yom Kippur when the Jews were occupied with their devotions. The Jews were caught off-guard but they recovered from the surprise, and immediately struck back. They raced through the Sinai desert, crossed the Suez, established a beachhead on the west bank of the canal – 60 miles from Cairo, and surrounded the whole Egyptian Third Army!

It was American pressure on Israel that saved the Egyptian Third Army. But curiously, Egypt claimed the military action against Israel a "victory" for herself. War and "victory," the Egyptian government said, had restored the morale and self-respect of Egypt even though it was the United Nations and the United States which on this, as on earlier occasions, had rescued them from disaster.

In June 1982 Israel rode rough shod into Lebanon. She evicted the Palestinian guerrillas from the country as the whole Arab world sat gazing in silent despair – a truly helpless giant if ever there was any.

In all these wars one thing the Arabs did not lack was economic power. They had more of it than any other country in the Third World. As for manpower, the Arabs outnumbered Israelis by more than 50 to 1. And yet, never before did they face the paradox of the combination of wealth and powerlessness; material abundance and moral bankruptcy; strategic importance and humiliation, as they are doing in their confrontation with Israel. It may even be said that some Arab countries, e.g., Jordan, are enjoying their "independence" only by the "courtesy" of Israel.

Thus it appears that religion, any religion, pagan, animistic, Christian or Islamic, had little, if anything, to do with the military conquests of a nation.

A recurring phenomenon in world history is that at any given time, any one nation, is supreme, militarily, politically, and in many cases, also intellectually. At that moment or in that epoch, it is irresistible and invincible.

The hundred years from 632 to 732 were the century of the Arabs. They were supreme, they were triumphant, they were irresistible and they were invincible – in that century. Islam united them and gave them a sense of direction, purpose and propulsive power. Without Islam, their future would have been just as irrelevant and barren as their past had been. But there is no correlation between their conquests on the one hand, and piety and religious enthusiasm on the other.

The Last Days of Umar bin al-Khattab

One of the friends of Umar was a certain Mughira bin Shaaba. Umar had appointed him governor, first of Basra, and later of Kufa.

A slave of Mughira had a certain grouse against him. He requested Umar's intercession, and upon the latter's refusal, he attacked him, and mortally wounded him.

A physician was called. He gave Umar some medicine to drink but all of it came out of the gaping wound in his navel. When the physician noticed this, he told Umar that there was no hope of his recovery, and advised him to make his will since little time was left for him in this world.

Word rapidly spread that the khalifa was mortally wounded, and the news caused much commotion in the city.

Many companions called on Umar to enquire after his health. Some of them suggested that he designate someone as his successor. Umar said:

"If I designate someone as my successor, nothing would be amiss with it since Abu Bakr designated me as his successor, and he was better than me. But if I do not designate anyone as my successor, nothing would be amiss with that either since the Apostle of God did not designate his own successor, and he was better than both of us (Abu Bakr and Umar)."

Ayesha also sent word to Umar urging him to appoint someone as khalifa before his own death, or else, she warned, "anarchy and chaos may spread in the land."

Umar asked Ayesha's messenger to tell her as follows:
"I have considered this matter, and I have decided to appoint six men as members of an electoral committee, and to charge them with the task of selecting one out of themselves as khalifa. The six men are: Ali, Uthman, Abdur Rahman bin Auf; Talha, Zubayr and Saad bin Abi Waqqas. The Apostle of God was pleased with all six of them when he left this world, and each of them is qualified to become the khalifa of the Muslims."

Umar then called all six members of his electoral committee to his home to explain to them what they had to do. When they came, he addressed them as follows:

"O group of Muhajireen! Verily, the Apostle of God died, and he was pleased with all six of you. I have, therefore, decided to make it (the selection of khalifa) a matter of consultation among you, so that you may select one of yourselves as khalifa. If five of you agree upon one man, and there is one who is opposed to the five, kill him. If four are one side and two on the other, kill the two. And if three are on one side and three

on the other, then Abdur Rahman ibn Auf will have the casting vote, and the khalifa will be selected from his party. In that case, kill the three men on the opposing side. You may, if you wish, invite some of the chief men of the Ansar as observers but the khalifa must be one of you Muhajireen, and not any of them. They have no share in the khilafat. And your selection of the new khalifa must be made within three days." (Tabari, History)

Umar ordered his son, Abdullah, also to attend the meetings of the newly-formed electoral committee, though not as a candidate for caliphate, and said to him:

"If the members of this committee disagree among themselves, you support those who are in majority. If there is a tie with three on each side, then you support the party of Abdur Rahman bin Auf."

Sir John Glubb

Umar had prescribed a maximum of three days for their (the electoral committee's) deliberations. At the end of that period, they must willy-nilly unanimously choose a khalif. In the event of the decision not being unanimous, the majority candidate was to be adopted, the members of the minority being all immediately put to death." (The Great Arab Conquests, 1967)

When Umar was satisfied that he had done his duty in the matter of his succession, he asked some of those men who were around him, whom out of the six nominees, they would like to see as their new khalifa. One of them present named Zubayr. Umar said: "Will you make your khalifa a man who is a believer when he is happy, and an unbeliever when he is angry?" Another man named Talha. Umar said: "Will you make your khalifa a man who has mortgaged the gift of the Apostle of God to a Jewess?" A third named Ali. Umar said: "If you make him your khalifa, he will not let you deviate from truth but I know that you will not."

Walid bin Aqaba, a half-brother of Uthman, was also present in the assembly. When he heard Umar's comments on the candidates, he exclaimed: "I know who will become the next khalifa." Umar who was lying down, sat up in the bed, and asked, who. Walid said: "Uthman."

Umar ordered Abu Talha Ansari to lead the Muslims in prayer during the interregnum, and also to watch the members of the electoral committee during their deliberations. He also gave him fifty armed men to enable him to carry out his duties. These men were to act, if necessary, as executioners (Tarikh Kamil).

On the following day, Umar called the members of the electoral committee again, and when they came, he said: "So everyone of you wants to become the khalifa after me?" Everyone kept quiet. Umar repeated his question whereupon Zubayr said: "And what's wrong with that? You became khalifa and you managed it. Why can't we? " Umar then asked: "Shall I tell you something about each of you?" Zubayr answered: "Go ahead; tell us." Umar commented upon them as follows:

"Saad bin Abi Waqqas is a good archer but he is arrogant, and khilafat is beyond his reach. Talha is rude, greedy and conceited. Abdur Rahman is too much given to comfort and luxury; if he becomes khalifa, his wives will run the government. Zubayr is a believer when he is in a happy mood but is an unbeliever when he is angry. Ali is worthy of being the ruler of the Muslims in every respect but he is too ambitious."

Umar then turned to Uthman, and said:

"Take it from me. It is as if I am seeing with my own eyes that the Quraysh have put this necklace (khilafat) around your neck, and you have foisted the Banu Umayya and the Banu Abi Muayt (Uthman's family) upon the Muslims, and have given them all the wealth of the umma. Then the wolves of the Arabs came, and slaughtered you. By God, if they (the Quraysh) do, you will certainly do; and if you do, they (the Arabs) will certainly do." (If the Quraysh make Uthman their khalifa, he would give all his power and authority to Banu Umayya; and when he does so, the Arabs will come and kill him).

Umar told the members of the electoral committee that the Apostle of God was "pleased" with them when he left this world. But was the Apostle pleased only with these six men? Was he displeased with the rest of the Muhajireen and the Ansar? If he was not, then why did Umar exclude all of them from his electoral committee? He did not give the rest of the Muhajireen and Ansar the right even to express an opinion much less the right to select their ruler.

Though Umar chose six Qurayshites as electors because as he said, the Apostle was pleased with them, he himself found nothing commendable in them. He found them arrogant, rude, greedy, conceited, henpecked, temperamental, venal and ambitious.

If, at the election of Abu Bakr, the principle was accepted that it is the right of the Muslim umma (people) to select or elect its own rulers, then how is it that the leading companions of the Prophet, and Ayesha, his widow, urged Umar to appoint his own successor? Didn't they know that a ruler was to be chosen by the umma? But Umar, instead of denying or affirming this right of the umma, said that if he appointed someone as khalifa, he would be following the precedent of Abu Bakr; and if he did not, then he would be following the precedent of the Prophet himself. In practice, however, he followed neither the precedent of Abu Bakr nor the precedent of the Prophet. He named six men as members of an electoral committee, and made them responsible for selecting a khalifa out of themselves – regardless of the opinions and wishes of the Muslim umma.

It is true that Umar did not name anyone as his successor but his electoral committee was, in point of fact, a de facto designation. Its constitution guaranteed the selection only of Umar's own candidate. His first stipulation was that the candidate who gets most of the votes, would become khalifa. There was no way for Ali to get most of the votes. Abdur Rahman bin Auf was the husband of the half-sister of Uthman. (This lady was the daughter of the mother of Uthman and her second husband). Saad bin Abi Waqqas was the first cousin of Abdur Rahman, and was under his influence. "Tribal solidarity" or "tribal chauvinism" was very strong among the Arabs. Talha belonged to the clan of Abu Bakr, and was married to one of his daughters (the sister of Ayesha). Therefore, it was unthinkable that any of them would vote for Ali. Thus Ali had to count out four votes even before the beginning of the parleys. All he could do, was to hope that he might get Zubayr's vote. In any case, Abdur Rahman bin Auf – the self-appointed king-maker, had the casting vote. As Umar's confidante, it was inevitable that he would give his vote and his support only to his (Umar's) favorite, and the brother of his own wife – Uthman.

Now the minority in the electoral committee had one of the two choices open before it, viz., either acquiesce in the king-maker's selection and acknowledge Uthman as khalifa or pass the sentence of death to itself!

Hudhaifa, a companion, reports that sometime before the attempt was made on his life, a few companions had asked Umar who would succeed him as khalifa, and he had told them, Uthman. (Kanz-ul-Ummal and Tarikh-Ahmedi).

The author of Riyadh-un-Nadhra writes in the same connection as follows:

"In the Hajj season someone asked Umar who would be the khalifa of the Muslims after him, and he said, Uthman bin Affan."

Umar desired nothing so much as to appoint Uthman as his successor but for some reason known only to him, he did not wish to do so openly. At the same time, he did not allow the Muslims to exercise their freewill in the matter of choosing their ruler. Left to themselves, they would not have chosen his favorite, and he knew it. He, therefore, devised a new mode of giving the umma its leader. This new mode, spun out with intricate sophistication, guaranteed the election of Uthman.

Umar had assembled the Electoral Committee only to dissemble!

Perhaps it would have served the interests of the umma better if Umar had openly appointed Uthman as his successor instead of framing a panel of electors for this purpose. A direct and open appointment would have averted the civil wars in Islam. His panel of electors proved to be the catalyst of the battles of Basra, Siffin and Nehrwan. He achieved his aim at the moment but only at the expense of the integrity of Islam in the future.

Abdullah ibn Abbas ibn Abdul-Muttalib was the first cousin of Muhammad Mustafa and Ali ibn Abi Talib. When he heard that Umar had given special powers to Abdur Rahman bin Auf in the panel of electors, he said to Ali:

"Khilafat is lost to us once again.This man (Umar) wants Uthman to be the new khalifa. I know they will keep khilafat out of the house of Muhammad."

Ali made the following comment:

"I agree with what you say. I have no illusions in this matter. Nevertheless, I shall attend the meeting(s) of the Shura (electoral committee), and the Muslims will see with their own eyes the conflict between Umar's words and his deeds. By placing my name in his electoral committee, he has, at least, acknowledged my right to become caliph whereas in the past, he went around saying that prophethood and caliphate ought never to combine in the same house."

How did Abdullah ibn Abbas know that Umar wanted Uthman to become the khalifa? As noted before, it was obvious from the constitution of the electoral committee. One look at its terms of reference was enough to convince anyone that the outcome of its quest was predetermined. Those terms of reference declared, loudly and unmistakably, that khilafat was going to be the prize of Uthman and the Umayyads. Therefore, after the promulgation by Umar of the constitution of his electoral committee, if Ali had any interest still left in it, and in its professed purpose, it was purely academic and abstract, and as he himself said, his participation in its meetings would do nothing more than point up the contradictions inherent in it.

This is the age of democracy. The people choose their leaders. Elections are held from the lowest to the highest levels of public life; from the chairmen of school committees and fund-raising groups to the heads of governments and states. But it has never so happened that those candidates for office who lose the election to their opponents, are put to death. The candidates who lose, become leaders of the opposition, and the existence of a healthy opposition is considered essential for the existence of democracy itself. If the opposition is liquidated, then democracy becomes a casualty, and the state becomes totalitarian.

Umar's order to kill the minority in his electoral committee has no parallel in the history of mankind. He ordered the execution of all those companions of Muhammad Mustafa, who as candidates for caliphate, would get fewer votes than their opposite numbers, even though he knew that it is the job of others to give or to withhold their votes. In other words, he decreed that it is a "crime" to get fewer votes than one's opponent, and the penalty is death!

This was the last decision of the man who once said: "The Book of God is sufficient for us." Did he really believe in what he said? Did he read that Book? Did he find sanction in that Book for his order to kill a candidate for a certain office because he scored lower than his opponent?

Here it should be pointed out that no one out of the six Muhajireen had applied to Umar for membership in his electoral committee. His action in choosing them was totally arbitrary. He then imposed upon them the duty of electing a khalifa with the stipulation that if anyone of them disagreed with the majority, he would forfeit his life.

Umar had obviously opted for the totalitarian "remedy" of taking the right of dissent away from the Muslims.

For many centuries, the Sunni Muslims have raved over what they call "the justice of Umar." Is his order to kill the dissenting member or members of his electoral committee a sample of that "justice?" Is it the sample of justice that they proudly uphold to the nations of the earth?

Umar died on the last Saturday of Zil-Hajj (the last month of the Islamic calendar) of 23 A.H. (A.D. 644), and he was buried next to the Prophet and Abu Bakr.

The Members of the Electoral Committee

Umar, on his deathbed, had appointed six Muhajireen as members of a panel which was to choose one out of themselves as the future khalifa of the Muslims. They were Ali ibn Abi Talib, Uthman, Talha, Zubayr, Abdur Rahman bin Auf and Saad bin Abi Waqqas. Except Ali, all other members of the panel were capitalists, or rather, neo-capitalists. When they came from Makkah, they were penniless and homeless but within twelve years, i.e., from the death of Muhammad Mustafa in 632 to the death of Umar in 644, each of them, except Ali, had become rich like Croesus. Between these two dates, they had accumulated immense wealth, and had become the richest men of their times.

Ali did not qualify as a member of this exclusive "club" but Umar admitted him anyway. Apart from the fact that Ali made his living as a gardener whereas his other five co-members lived on the revenues of their lands and estates, there was another gulf, even more unbridgeable, that separated him from them. In character, personality, temperament,

attitudes, philosophy and outlook on life, Ali and the rest of them were the antithesis of each other.

In an earlier chapter, it was pointed out that the famous line of Keats, "Beauty is Truth and Truth Beauty," can be transposed to read as "Economic power is political power and political power economic power." Economic power and political power are reciprocal. Karl Marx said: "Whatever social class has economic power, also has political and social power." And George Wald, professor of Biology at the Harvard University, said in an address in Tokyo in 1974: "Private wealth and personal political power are interchangeable."

There can be no doubt that economic power is a springboard of political power. This has been a consistent pattern throughout history.

President Abraham Lincoln had defined democracy as the government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

In the American presidential elections of 1984 when President Ronald Reagan was reelected, the Russians quipped:

"The United States Government is of the millionaires, by the millionaires and for the millionaires."

All the members of Umar's electoral committee, were millionaires – except Ali ibn Abi Talib! Following is a portrait left by historians of the members of Umar's Electoral Committee:

D. S. Margoliouth

Othman, son of Affan, six years the Prophet's junior, was a cloth merchant; he also did some business as a money-lender, advancing sums for enterprises of which he was to enjoy half the profits (Ibn Sa'd, iii, 111), and in money matters showed remarkable acuteness (Wakidi W. 231). His sister was a milliner, married to a barber (Isabah, i. 714). He was no fighting man, as his subsequent history proved, for he shirked one battlefield, ran away from another, and was killed, priest-like, ostentatiously reading the Koran."

Ibn Sa'd says in his Tabqaat about Othman: "When he died, he left 35 million dirhems, 150,000 dinars, 3000 camels, and many horses. He built himself a palace in Medina with marble and teakwood. He had 1000 slaves." (Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, London, 1931)

E. A. Belyaev

In his youth, before the rise of Islam, Uthman had been very rich and gained much money from profitable usurious transactions. Uthman's acquisitiveness and business talents gained full scope when he became caliph. He built himself a stone house in Medina with doors of precious wood and acquired much real estate in that city, including gardens and water sources. He had a large income from his fruit plantations in Wadi-ul-Qura, Hunain and other places, valued at 100,000 dinars, besides large herds of horses and camels on these estates. The day Uthman died his personal treasury was found to contain 150,000 dinars and one million dirhems.

Multiplying his riches at the expense of the Moslem treasury, Uthman also gave free use of the latter to some of the closest companions of Muhammad, attempting to justify his illegal actions by associating these most authoritative veteran Moslems with his own depredations. The "companions" applauded the caliph Uthman for his generosity and magnanimity, no doubt for solid reasons of self-interest.

Zubair ibn al-Awwam, for example, one of the better known amongst them, built tenement houses in Kufa, Basra, Fustat and Alexandria. His property was estimated at 50,000 dinars, in addition to which he possessed 1000 horses and 1000 slaves.

Another "companion," Talha ibn Ubaidullah, built a large tenement house in Kufa and acquired estates in Irak which brought in a daily 1000 dinars; he also built a luxurious house of brick and precious wood in Medina.

Abd-ar-Rahman ibn Auf, also an outstanding "companion," also built himself a rich and spacious dwelling; his stables contained 100 horses and his pastures 1000 camels and 10,000 sheep, and one quarter of the inheritance he left after his death was valued at 84,000 dinars.

Such acquisitiveness was widespread among the companions of the Prophet and Uthman's entourage. (Arabs, Islam and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages, New York, 1969)

Bernard Lewis

Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas built his house in Al-Aqiq. He made it high and spacious, and put balconies around the upper part. Sa'id ibn al-Musayyib said that when Zayd ibn Thabit died, he left ingots of gold and silver that were broken up with axes, in addition to property and estates to the value of 100,000 dinars. (Islam in History, New York, 1973)

Dr. Taha Husain of Egypt writes in his book, al-Fitna-tul-Kubra (The Great Upheaval), published by Dar-ul-Ma'arif, Cairo, 1959, p. 47:

"When Uthman became khalifa, he not only lifted the ban placed by Umar upon the companions to go to the other countries, but also gave them rich present from the public treasury. He gave Zubayr 600,000 dirhems in one day, and he gave Talha 100,000 dirhems in one day enabling them to buy lands, property and slaves in other countries."

Abdur Rahman bin Auf was a member of the inner circle of the friends of Uthman. About him Sir William Muir writes:

"Abd al-Rahman, when in after years he used to fare sumptuously on fine bread and every variety of meat, would weep while looking at his richly furnished table and thinking of the Prophet's straitened fare." (The Life of Mohammed, London 1877)

The love that Abdur Rahman bore his late master, Muhammad, was deeply moving. His wives and concubines prepared delicacies of many colors and tastes for him. When he sat down to eat, recollection came to him of the Spartan times of the Apostle. He "missed" him and he "missed" those times, shed many a tear, and then gobbled up everything on the table.

Sir William Muir sums up his impressions of the companions of the Apostle of God as follows:

"In pursuing the annals of the ‘companions' and first followers of Mohammed, few things so forcibly illustrate the spirit of Islam as, first, the number of their wives and concubines and the facility of divorce; and, next, the vast riches they amassed; a significant contrast with the early days of Christianity." (The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

Sir William Muir has done a great injustice, in the first place, in lumping the companions all together whereas there were two distinct categories of them. The first category which comprised the overwhelming majority, is the one he has correctly depicted in his book, but there also existed another, though very small, category, and he has taken no notice of it.

In the second place, Sir William Muir has attributed the insatiable acquisitiveness of the companions to "the spirit of Islam," and this is an even grosser injustice. The acquisitiveness of the companions, or rather, the acquisitiveness of most of the companions of the Apostle, illustrates, not the spirit of Islam, but a reaction against that spirit. The obsession with materialism runs counter to the spirit and genius of Islam. Qur'an has castigated those people who amass gold and silver.

If anyone wishes to see the real spirit of Islam, he will find it, not in the deeds of the nouveaux riches of Medina, but in the life, character and deeds of such companions of the Apostle of God as Ali ibn Abi Talib, Salman el-Farsi, Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir, Owais Qarni and Bilal. The orientalists will change their assessment of the spirit of Islam if they contemplate it in the austere, pure and sanctified lives of these latter companions.

It may be noted that the members of the electoral committee were all men of Makkah. There was no man of Medina among them. Umar had studiously kept them out. When he was explaining to the members of the committee what they had to do, he addressed them as "O group of Muhajireen." He told them that the khalifa had to be one of them, and that the men of Medina had no share in khilafat. Some companions pressed Umar to appoint his own successor. He named a number of people who were dead, and said that if any of them were alive, he would have appointed him as his successor.

Dr. Taha Husain

"The Prophet of Islam had been dead, not days but only a few hours when Islam was confronted with its first crisis - in the matter of his succession. The Ansar said to the Muhajireen: 'One chief from us and one from you.' But Abu Bakr did not agree to this, and he quoted the following tradition of the Prophet: 'The rulers shall be from the Quraysh.' Then

he said to the Ansar: ‘We shall be rulers and you will be our ministers.' The Ansar accepted this arrangement (with the exception of Saad ibn Ubada).

This is how the ‘aristocracy' of Islam was born. Its right to rule rested on its propinquity to Muhammad. All authority was vested in the Quraysh. The Ansar were the advisers. Every Muslim has the right to offer advice. The Quraysh were to rule, and the Ansar and the other Muslims were to give advice but not to rule.

When Umar was dying, he was questioned about his successor, and he said: ‘If Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah were alive, I would have made him the khalifa. If Khalid bin al-Walid were alive, I would have appointed him the amir of the Muslims. And if Salim, the client of Abu Hudhaifa, were living today, then I would have designated him as your ruler.' This Salim was a slave who came from Istakhar in Persia. He was emancipated, and became a ‘mawali' (client) of Abu Hudhaifa. He was well-known for his piety. Many Muslims deferred to him in matters of Faith even in the times of the Prophet. Sometimes he led the Muslims in prayer also. He was killed in the Ridda wars during the khilafat of Abu Bakr. He was a devout and God-fearing man." (al-Fitna-tul-Kubra {The Great Upheaval}, published by Dar-ul-Ma'arif, Cairo, 1959).

It was really unfortunate for the umma that Salim was dead or else Umar would have made him his successor, and he might have made an excellent khalifa. At any rate, Umar knocked down that "tradition" of the Apostle which Abu Bakr had quoted before the Ansar in Saqifa according to which no one but the Quraysh had the right to become rulers. Here was Umar, the greatest "pontiff" of the Sunni establishment, ready, willing and eager to make Salim the khalifa of the Muslims, who was:

(a)a non-Qurayshi
(b)a non-Arab
(c)a ‘non-free' man, a client, a man who was emancipated by an Arab, and who was under his protection.

Umar "proved" on his deathbed that the "tradition" of the "Qurayshi connection" by which the Muhajireen had claimed their "superiority" over the Ansar in Saqifa, was spurious, and he "proved" that to be a khalifa of the Muslims, it was not necessary to be a Qurayshi after all.

Umar could consider a former slave who was not distinguished for anything except for his piety, for the most important position in Islam but he could not consider an Ansari for it, even if he had distinguished himself in war and peace. The Ansaris, in fact, could not fill even less important positions. In his book, Al-Farooq, M. Shibli, the Indian historian, has published a list of the names of the civil and military officers of his (Umar's) time. With one solitary exception (Uthman bin Hunaif), the entire list is made up of names of men who were noted for their animosity to Ali, to Banu Hashim, and to the Ansar.

These Ansaris were the same people who had, at one time, given sanctuary to Umar in their city. They had given him food, clothing and shelter when he did not have any of these things. Now he was repaying them!

Umar's attitude toward the Ansar is in sharp contrast to the attitude toward them of Muhammad, the Messenger of God. The latter loved the Ansar. He appointed many of them as governors of Medina, and he made many of them commanders of various expeditions. On one occasion he said that he would rather be with them (the Ansar) than with any other people. He also considered them capable of and qualified to rule the Muhajireen.

Montgomery Watt

The remark of Muhammad about Sa'd bin Mu'adh when he was about to judge the case of Banu Qurayza, "Stand for your chief (Sayyid)," could be taken to justify the view that the Ansar were capable of ruling over Quraysh, and the story was therefore twisted in various ways to remove this implication. (Muhammad at Medina, Oxford, 1966)

The Apostle of God called Sa'd the Chief of the Quraysh. Sa'd was obviously capable of ruling the Quraysh, and why not? After all what was there in the "credentials" of the Quraysh that the Ansar didn't have? Nothing. But the Ansar lost their capability of ruling the Quraysh as soon as Muhammad, their master, died. During the caliphate of Abu Bakr and Umar, it was a "disqualification" to be an Ansari to hold any important position in the government.

Laura Veccia Vaglieri

As he lay dying, Umar was anxious about the succession and he appointed a committee of six, all Qurayshites, whose duty it should be to choose one of their number as caliph. The inhabitants of Medina no longer had any share in the election of the head of the state. (Cambridge History of Islam, Cambridge, 1970)

Far from having a share in the election of the head of the state, not to speak of themselves becoming the head of the state, the inhabitants of Medina, did not have a share in anything. They might have given some "advice" to Abu Bakr and Umar. In Saqifa, Abu Bakr and Umar had told them that they would consult them (the Ansar) in all matters.

Few, if any, would challenge the general interpretation of this poignant fact that the most important and most indispensable single factor in the year 1 of Hijri, namely, the support of the Ansar, had become the most striking non-factor in the year 11 Hijri.

The Cassandra utterances of Hubab ibn al-Mandhir in the bedlam of Saqifa proved only too true. He had expressed the fear that the children of the Ansar would beg for food at the doors of the houses of the Muhajireen, and would not get any. Much worse was to come for them in the times of Yazid bin Muawiya.

The Ansar fought in all the campaigns of Abu Bakr and Umar but only as other ranks and never as generals. The new wealth which came flooding into Medina after the conquest of Persia and the Fertile Crescent, also appears to have bypassed them with the exception of a few, who collaborated with the Saqifa government. Among the latter were the two spies from the tribe of Aus who had squealed on the Khazraj to Umar and Abu Bakr. Others were Muhammad bin Maslama, Bashir bin Saad, and Zayd bin Thabit. They had shown great zeal in taking the oath of loyalty to Abu Bakr in Saqifa.

Zayd bin Thabit was fanatically devoted to Uthman, and for this reason, he received many gifts and rewards from the treasury. He was the son of poor parents but during the caliphate of Uthman, became one of the richest men in Medina.

Two officers of the public treasury in Medina and in Kufa who had been appointed by Abu Bakr, had thrown the keys of the treasuries in their charge, before Uthman, in protest against the plunder of the public funds by himself and by one of his governors. Uthman gave both keys to Zayd bin Thabit.

Zayd bin Thabit was also the chairman of the committee appointed by Uthman to collect the verses of Qur’an, and to publish them in one volume, as noted before.

Zayd bin Thabit was one of the few Ansaris who shared the bonanza in the times of Umar and Uthman. He was also one of the few Ansaris who did not take part in the campaigns of Ali in Basra, Siffin and Nehrwan. Most of the Ansaris fought on Ali's side against his enemies in these battles.

Following deductions can be made from Umar's arrangements for finding a khalifa:

1. It is not necessary for the khalifa of the Muslims to be a Qurayshi. Even an emancipated slave like Salim can become their khalifa. The "tradition" that the leaders must be members of the tribe of Quraysh, was cooked up and was attributed to the Prophet on a special occasion, and for a special purpose; it worked in Saqifa, and checkmated the Ansar.

2. The incumbent khalifa can arbitrarily restrict the right and power to choose a new khalifa to five or six men without any reference to the Muslim umma. The Muslim umma can be safely ignored.

3. Within the electoral committee, if a man disagrees with the majority, he merits death, even if he is a friend of the Prophet of Islam; even if he fought at Badr; and even if he is a "Companion of the Tree." Nothing can save him.

4. The Muslim umma can be left leaderless for three days. It is not necessary to select a new khalifa immediately after the death of the incumbent khalifa. A khalifa was chosen immediately after the death but before the burial of Muhammad Mustafa, on the ground that the Muslim umma ought not to be without a head even for a moment. Umar thus set a new precedent, viz., flexibility in the application of political "principles."

5. Those drawbacks and shortcomings of character which Umar found in the members of his electoral committee, such as lust, anger, arrogance, conceit, greed, nepotism and ambition, etc., are not a disqualification for khilafat. A man may be arrogant, conceited, henpecked and greedy; he can still become a khalifa of the Muslims. A khalifa does not have to be a man of outstanding character and ability.

Muawiya's Verdict on Umar's Electoral Committee

Ibn Abd Rabbeh writes in his famous book, Iqd-ul-Farid (The Unique Necklace), Volume II, page 203, that many years after Muawiya was firmly established on the throne, and had consolidated his position as the khalifa of the Muslims, he posed, one day, the following question to one of his courtiers:

Muawiya: You are a wise, intelligent and knowledgeable man. I would like to know what in your opinion, exactly, was the cause of the civil wars of the Muslims.

The Courtier: The murder of Uthman.

Muawiya: No.

The Courtier: Ali's accession to the throne.

Muawiya: No.

The Courtier: Then I will request the Commander of the Faithful to enlighten me in this regard.

Muawiya: Well, I will tell you what was the real cause of the civil wars of the Muslims. All the conflicts and civil wars of the Muslims had their origins in the electoral committee which Umar appointed to choose a khalifa.

Muawiya was right. The seeds of civil war in Islam were planted on the day when Umar picked out the members of his electoral committee. Instead of one candidate for caliphate, he made six candidates. If his decision to appoint his successor had been as direct and forthright as that of Abu Bakr had been, Islam might have been spared the traumatic and horrendous experience of civil wars so early in its career. The Muslims who fought against and killed each other in these civil wars, did not belong to the distant future; they belonged to the generation of the Prophet himself.

Civil wars broke out in Islam at a time when its idealism was supposed to be still fresh. But the elective system devised by Umar had built-in confrontation, and it took Islam across a great divide. His policy proved to be counter-productive, and his mode of giving the Muslims a leader through his panel of electors turned out to be one of the greatest misfortunes of the history of Islam.

Umar and Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God

Umar had accepted Islam at the end of the year 6 of the Call. Seven years later, he migrated with other Muslims to Medina. In Medina, these immigrants (Muhajireen) made a fresh start in life.

In Medina, there were occasions when Umar had to remind Muhammad that in him (in Umar), he (Muhammad) had to reckon with a man who had great reserves of moral courage. If he disagreed with him (with Muhammad), he was not at all queasy about expressing his disagreement. Thus, among all the companions, he (Umar) alone had the moral courage to show his resentment and insolence to him (to Muhammad) at Hudaybiyya when he (Muhammad) signed a treaty of peace with the Quraysh.

There were other occasions when Umar found it his unpleasant "duty" to "correct" the "errors" of Muhammad, the Apostle of God. Following are some incidents in which Umar figured as a critic of the actions of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam.

When Abdullah bin Ubayy died, the Apostle attended his funeral, and prayed to God to forgive him and to bestow mercy upon his soul. Umar tried to dissuade him from doing so by pointing out that Ibn Ubayy had been a Munafiq (hypocrite).

It is true that Abdullah bin Ubayy was a hypocrite. But his hypocrisy was not a secret from anyone in Medina. Everyone knew that he was a hypocrite. On the eve of the battle of Uhud, he withdrew his contingent of 300 warriors from the army on the ostensible pretext that the Muslims had not accepted his plan of the battle.

In that battle, the Muslims were defeated. But they were defeated not because of Ibn Ubayy's defection but because of their own greed and

indiscipline. The withdrawal of Ibn Ubayy's troops did not affect the fortunes of war in any way.

Since Ibn Ubayy played a divisive role in a crisis, the Muslims were alert at all times for what he might do. He could, therefore, never catch them off-guard. He was a known and an "open" hypocrite.

Far more dangerous to Islam were the hypocrites who were "hidden" from the sight of the Muslims. The true believers considered them to be sincere Muslims and trusted them. This trust of the Muslims in them made the Muslim society and the State of Medina much more vulnerable to sabotage by them. Al-Qur'an al-Majid is a witness to the presence in Medina, in large numbers, of these hypocrites, and has castigated them repeatedly. It were they – the hidden hypocrites – and not Abdullah ibn Ubayy and his supporters – who were the real source of danger to the security of Islam.

Abdullah ibn Ubayy's son was a true believer. He volunteered to kill him (his father). But Muhammad, the bringer of mercy, did not let him. And when Ibn Ubayy died, he (Muhammad) condoned all his transgressions, most of which, he knew, were products of frustration. Before the Prophet's arrival from Makkah, he (Ibn Ubayy) had hoped to become the king of Medina.

To forgive and to forget was characteristic of Muhammad's magnanimity. Earlier, he had shown the same magnanimity toward the idolaters of Makkah when he conquered that city, and granted amnesty to them all. It was, therefore, entirely, "in character" for him to conduct the funeral services for Ibn Ubayy, to see that he was given a proper burial, to pray for his soul, and to offer condolences to his son, notwithstanding Umar's remonstrance.

In late 630, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, sustained a personal loss. His son, Ibrahim, from his Egyptian wife, Maria the Copt, died when he was 11 months old (some say 16 months). Muhammad was very much attached to him. He was deeply aggrieved at his death, and could not withhold his tears. Umar took it upon himself to call his (Muhammad's) attention to the "impropriety" of shedding tears at the death of his son.

If Umar was right in his attempts to prevent the Apostle of God from commiserating with the bereaved members of the family of Abdullah ibn Ubayy, and in invoking God's mercy upon his (Ibn Ubayy's) soul; or if he was right in trying to prevent him from crying at the death of his own son, then it must be said that Islam is a highly "dehumanized" religion which denies Muslims even the "right" to forgive their enemies, and withholds from them the freedom of expression of such innocuous feelings as sympathy and sorrow. But such is not the case. Islam is not "dehumanized." It is, in fact, the most humane of all religions, and urges its followers to be forgiving, kind, courteous and considerate to others; and commands them never to be vindictive. Vindictiveness was considered a pagan characteristic. Islam also commands Muslims, in the following verses of Al-Qur’an al-Majid, to return good for evil:

And turn off evil with good. (Chapter 13; verse 22)

Repel evil with that which is best. (Chapter 23: verse 96)

Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel (evil) with what is better: then will he between whom and thee was hatred, become as it were thy friend and intimate. (Chapter 41: verse 34)

Muhammad Mustafa, the Interpreter of Al-Qur’an al-Majid, gave a demonstration of the application of these commandments of Heaven at the death of Abdullah ibn Ubayy.

In the summer of A.D. 632, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, lay on his deathbed in his house in Medina. His last wish was to comply with the commandment in the Book of God to write his will and testament. But Umar did not countenance this idea. In his opinion, writing a will was not the right thing for the Prophet of Islam to do. At Hudaybiyya, he had opposed the Prophet but had failed in his opposition; this time, however, he had no intention of failing. He opposed the dying Prophet, and he scored a brilliant success in his opposition. The will the Prophet wished to write, was never written.

If Umar was right in his attempts to inhibit the freedom of action of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, then it means that the latter was "wrong." And if he (Muhammad) was "wrong," then it means that Al-Qur’an al-Majid was also "wrong" because it claimed that:

Nor does he (Muhammad) say (anything) of (his own) desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him. (Chapter 53; verses 3 and 4)

If Umar was right, then Muhammad and Qur'an were "wrong." This is the only conclusion to which such a line of argument can lead. It is now for the Muslims to decide if this is the "logic" which appeals to them, and therefore, is acceptable to them.

When Muhammad Mustafa died in A.D. 632, his successors - Abu Bakr and Umar - lost no time in seizing the estate of Fadak from his daughter. Umar was a conscientious man, and he was presumably prompted by his moral courage to "rectify" the "error" which Muhammad had made in giving the estate of Fadak to his daughter in A.D. 628.

Umar had, to all intents and purposes, appointed himself a "censor" of the words and deeds of Muhammad while the latter was still alive. If he countermanded his (Muhammad's) orders after his death vis-à-vis his succession or the estate of Fadak, there is nothing odd about it. If he had any inhibitions in this matter, he threw them overboard as soon as Muhammad died.

Muhammad, the Apostle of God, had expressed the wish, on his deathbed, to write his will, and as noted before, Umar had thwarted him by shouting that the Book of God was sufficient for the Muslim umma, and that it did not need any other writing from him.

Umar, it appears, actually believed in what he said, viz., a will or any other writing of the Prophet was redundant since Qur'an had the ultimate answers to all the questions. And if any doubts still lingered in anyone's mind on this point, he removed them when he became khalifa.

Muhammad lived in the hearts of his companions and friends. After his death, they wished to preserve all their recollections of his life. These recollections were of two kinds - his words and his deeds. The two together formed his Sunnah (the trodden path). Anything he said, and was quoted by a companion, is called a hadith or 'tradition.'

But Umar did not want the companions to preserve any recollection of the words and the deeds of the Prophet. He, apparently, had many reservations regarding the usefulness, to the Muslim umma, of these recollections. He, therefore, forbade the companions to quote the sayings of the

Prophet in speech or in writing. In other words, he placed the Hadith of the Prophet under a proscription.

Following is the testimony of two modern Sunni historians on Umar's ban on Hadith:

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Umar ibn al-Khattab once tried to deal with the problem of committing the Hadith to writing. The companions of the Prophet whom he consulted, encouraged him, but he was not quite sure whether he should proceed. One day, moved by God's inspiration, he made up his mind and announced: "I wanted to have the traditions of the Prophet written down, but I fear that the Book of God might be encroached upon. Hence I shall not permit this to happen." He, therefore, changed his mind and instructed the Muslims throughout the provinces: "Whoever has a document bearing a prophetic tradition, shall destroy it." The Hadith, therefore, continued to be transmitted orally and was not collected and written down until the period of al-Mamun. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Dr. Mohammad Hamidullah

Abu-Dhahabi reports: The Caliph Abu-Bakr compiled a work, in which there were 500 traditions of the Prophet, and handed it over to his daughter 'Aishah. The next morning, he took it back from her and destroyed it, saying: "I wrote what I understood; it is possible however that there should be certain things in it which did not correspond textually with what the Prophet had uttered."

As to Umar, we learn on the authority of Ma'mar ibn Rashid, that during his caliphate, Umar once consulted the companions of the Prophet on the subject of codifying the Hadith. Everybody seconded the idea. Yet Umar continued to hesitate and pray to God for a whole month for guidance and enlightenment. Ultimately, he decided not to undertake the task, and said: "Former peoples neglected the Divine Books and concentrated only on the conduct of the prophets; I do not want to set up the possibility of confusion between the Divine Qur’an and the Prophet's Hadith." (Introduction to Islam, Kuwait, pp. 34-35, 1977)

One of the companions whom the Sunni Muslims consider one of the greatest authorities on Hadith, was Abu Hurayra. He was ever ready to quote a Hadith. There was never an occasion when recollection did not come to him of something he had heard the Prophet saying or something he had seen him doing. Once Umar asked him:

"O Abu Hurayra! Tell me this. Did the Messenger of God have nothing in the world to do except to whisper Hadith in your ears?"

Umar then ordered Abu Hurayra not to narrate any more Hadith.

Abu Hurayra was a very gregarious and a garrulous man. When Umar gagged him, he felt bottled up. But he was a patient man, and quietly awaited the time when he would be unmuzzled. His opportunity came when Umar died, and he returned, with a vengeance, to the business of relating Hadith. Today, the books of Hadith, compiled by Sunni collectors, are brimming with traditions narrated by him.

It is perhaps interesting to speculate on Umar's decision in placing the traditions of the Prophet under proscription. Did he believe that the proscription would outlast his own caliphate? There is no way of knowing the answer to this question. But he could not have meant the proscription to be effective only during his own lifetime; he could only have meant it to be everlasting. If so, then did he want to deprive the Muslims of the record of the precepts and precedents of their Prophet forever?

Muhammad Husayn Haykal says in the passage quoted above from his book that Umar was "moved by God's inspiration" to place the Hadith of the Apostle of God under proscription. This means that Umar's authority to order the suppression of Hadith, was implicit in the "inspiration" of which he was the recipient, and he didn't hesitate to exercise it. In exercising his "inspired" authority, he overrode even the consensus of the companions. Consensus, incidentally, is a very important principle in Sunni jurisprudence. But Umar was right in overriding it. After all the consensus of fallible, earth-bound mortals could never supersede the authority of Umar's "inspiration."

But Umar's ordinance suppressing Hadith leaves one vital question unanswered, viz., is it possible to understand and to practice Islam at all, and to obey the commandments of God embodied in Al-Qur'an al-Majid,

without the knowledge and understanding of the sermons, statements, speeches, commands, prohibitions, precedents, examples and explanations of Muhammad Mustafa? Was it, for example, possible for the companions to know, merely by reading Qur'an, how to say the five canonical prayers if Muhammad himself had not taught them? Or, would they have known how much Zakat (poor-tax) to pay, when to pay and whom to pay if they had not seen the Apostle himself paying it?

Without Hadith, Muslims could never understand the ideology of Islam nor could they grasp its practicability. In this regard, the contemporary, Austrian-born scholar, translator and commentator of Qur'an, Muhammad Asad, writes in his book, Islam At The Crossroads, as follows:

The Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad is, (therefore) next to Qur'an, the second source of Islamic law of social and personal behavior. In fact we must regard the Sunnah as the only valid explanation of the Qur'anic teachings and the only means to avoid dissension concerning their interpretation and adaptation to practical use. Many verses of the Qur'an have allegorical meaning and could be understood in different ways unless there was some definite system of interpretation. And there are, furthermore, many items of practical importance not explicitly dealt with by the Qur'an. The spirit prevailing in the Holy Book is, to be sure, uniform throughout; but to deduce from it the practical attitude which we have to adopt is not, in every case, an easy matter. So long as we believe that this Book is the word of God, perfect in form and purpose, the only logical conclusion is that it never was intended to be used independently of the personal guidance of the Prophet which is embodied in the system of Sunnah. (pp. 117-118)

The Apostle's statements and his actions were a detailed interpretation and application of the principles of the Book of God. That Book has repeatedly and emphatically called upon the Muslims to obey him and to follow him, as per the following verses:

Say: if ye do love God, follow me: God will love you and forgive your sins; for God is oft-forgiving, most Merciful. (Chapter 3; verse 31)

God did confer a great favor on the believers when He sent among them an Apostle from among themselves, rehearsing unto them the signs

of God, sanctifying them, and instructing them in Scripture and Wisdom, while before that they had been in Manifest Error. (Chapter 3: verse 164)

Those are limits set by God: those who obey God and His Apostle, will be admitted to the Gardens with Rivers flowing beneath, to abide therein (forever) and that will be the supreme achievement.

(Chapter 4: verse 13)

O ye who believe! Obey God, and obey His Apostle, and those charged with authority among you. if ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and his apostle… (Chapter4: verse 59)

We sent an Apostle but to be obeyed, in accordance with the will of God. (Chapter 4: verse 64)

But no, by thy Lord, they can have no (real) faith, until they make thee judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against thy decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction. (Chapter 4: verse 65)

He who obeys the Apostle, obeys God. (Chapter4: verse 80)

Obey God and His Apostle, if ye do believe. (Chapter 8: verse 1)

It is such as obey God and His Apostle, and fear God and do right, that will win (in the end). (Chapter 24: verse 52)

Ye have indeed in the Apostle of God a beautiful pattern of conduct for everyone whose hope is in God and the final day, and who engages much in remembering God. (Chapter 33: verse 21)

O ye who believe! Obey God, and obey the Apostle, and make not vain your deeds. (Chapter 47: verse 33)

Whatever the Messenger assigns to you, take it, and deny yourselves that which he withholds from you, and fear God. (Chapter 59: verse 7)

From the foregoing verses, it is clear that Umar's ban on Hadith was in a head-on collision course with the commandments of Al-Qur’an al-Majid. Quran as the explicit Word of God, and Hadith as the explicit word of His Last Messenger, form one integral whole, each elucidating, amplifying and illuminating the other. Sunni jurists perhaps did not want to set themselves at odds with Umar but they also realized that

there was no way for them to dispense with Hadith, and still call themselves Muslims, and that his ban (on Hadith) could not coexist with Islam. They, therefore, discreetly tiptoed around the issue. "Let the Hadith of our Prophet be free of bans," was their tacit consensus even if such a reorientation of thought was painful to some of them, and they decided to address themselves to the most vital task of collecting, collating, and preserving, for themselves and for posterity the record of the sayings and the deeds of Muhammad Mustafa, their Guide and Leader in this world and in the world to come.

Chapter 58

Uthman, the Third Khalifa of the Muslims

JUST BEFORE HIS DEATH, Umar called Abu Talha Ansari, and said to him:

"God has given honor to Islam through you (the Ansar), and now you take your 50 armed men to watch the members of the electoral committee, and do not let them disperse without choosing a khalifa which they must do within three days."

The electors began their parleys in the house of Miswar bin Makhrama – the nephew of Abdur Rahman bin Auf. Abu Talha Ansari began his three-day long vigil. Amr bin Aas and Mughira bin Shaaba, also appeared at the door of the house of Miswar, eager to take part in the proceedings of the committee but the pickets of Abu Talha did not let them enter.

Because of the "special powers" Umar had given him, Abdur Rahman bin Auf considered himself the key figure of the electoral committee. In a size-up of the situation, he gathered that no one of the other five candidates was willing to withdraw his name from the contest, and everyone was determined to press his claim vigorously. He, therefore, quietly developed a strategy of his own, and then told the committee that he would withdraw his name from the list of candidates if it would, in return, allow him to act as chairman and coordinator of its meeting(s).

Other members agreed but Ali hesitated to give Abdur Rahman any extra powers. When others insisted that he too should agree, he said to him:

"I shall acknowledge you as chairman of the electoral committee if you give a pledge that you will not be a slave to your own lusts, and that

your decision will be taken only to win the pleasure of God and His Messenger."

Abdur Rahman readily gave his pledge for doing so, and thus became the chairman of the committee. By withdrawing his candidacy, he won extra leverage with the other candidates, and cast himself in the role of a "king-maker."

Abdur Rahman held a series of meetings with other candidates in an attempt to find a satisfactory solution of the problem but his efforts bore no fruit. The discussions of the other candidates during the first two days also ended in stalemate.

On the third and the last day, Abdur Rahman paid a visit to each member of the committee in his own house. In these private meetings, he asked each candidate whom he would like to see as khalifa if he himself were not elected. The answer was Uthman or Ali. This meant that the choice was narrowed down to these two men, one of whom had to become khalifa, but which one?

That evening, Abdur Rahman, the king-maker, called on his old friend, Amr bin Aas, explained to him his predicament, and added:

"I have been so perplexed in this matter that I have known no rest for three days. Today is the last day, and I still have found no answer to our problem. What is troubling me is the fear lest Ali becomes the caliph. And before Umar died, I gathered from his manner and attitude that he too was haunted by the same fear."

Amr bin Aas was much more skillful than Abdur Rahman or anyone else at the kind of game the latter was trying to play. He said: "I know the move that will checkmate Ali." He then explained the move to Abdur Rahman. The latter welcomed the bright idea and felt happy and confident that he would preclude Ali from becoming the caliph.

On the following morning, the Muslims assembled in the Mosque of the Prophet. It was a momentous day in their lives when they would know who their future sovereign was going to be. Presently the king-maker and other members of the electoral committee also arrived and took their seats. After a brief pause the king-maker rose. He made an

announcement of the purpose of the gathering, underscored its importance, and called upon the Muslims to abide by the decision of the electoral committee which Umar had appointed.

The air was charged with tension, and every man was keyed up, ready as if to snap any moment. Abdur Rahman bin Auf, the king-maker, turned toward Ali, held his hand, and posed to him the following question:

"If we give you charge of the government of the Muslims, and put you in authority over their affairs, do you solemnly promise to act according to the Book of God, the Sunna of His Apostle, and the precedents of Abu Bakr and Umar?"

(The proviso to act according to the precedents of Abu Bakr and Umar was not stipulated by Umar himself. It was the "move" which Amr bin Aas had suggested to Abdur Rahman bin Auf. He knew that Ali would not accept it.)

Ali replied to the king-maker as follows:

"I shall act according to the Book of God, and the Sunna of His Apostle. As for following the precedents of Abu Bakr and Umar, I have a judgment of my own, and I am going to use it."

Ali knew just what would happen next.

The king-maker let his hand fall. He then turned to Uthman, and repeated the same question to him. Uthman immediately agreed. Thereupon the king-maker himself became the first to give him his pledge of loyalty. He congratulated him on becoming the new khalifa, and signaled the others to give him their pledge of loyalty.

The khalifa had been chosen. The new khalifa of the Muslims was Uthman bin Affan.

Ali let caliphate slip from his hand but he did not compromise with a principle. He did not consider Abu Bakr and Umar lawful successors of Muhammad, and he refused to imitate them in anything.

R. V. C. Bodley

The six counselors appointed by Omar met as soon as the funeral was over. The caliphate was first offered to Ali with the condition that he govern according to the Koran, the traditions of Mohammed, and the regulations established by Abu Bakr and Umar. Ali accepted the first two conditions, and refused the third. The offer was, accordingly, withdrawn and Othman was approached with the same terms. Being less honest than Ali, he accepted them without demur." (The Messenger – the Life of Mohammed, New York, 1946)

Abdur Rahman bin Auf knew that no one among the companions had more knowledge of the Book of God, or was more attached to His Apostle than Ali. But when he invoked the Qur’an and the Sunna of the Apostle, in his offer of caliphate to the candidates, he was only playing for the "gallery." His stipulation that Ali should act as per the commandments of Qur’an and should follow the Sunna of Muhammad, was tactical rather than philosophical; more cosmetic than basic. His real interest was in a commitment by Ali to follow the precedents of Abu Bakr and Umar, both of whom had made it possible for him and many others, to become rich and powerful.

Capitalism, that "hideous pagan idol" of the Times of Ignorance, and the other idols that the Quraysh worshipped in Makkah, had been given a burial by Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God. But after his death, the capitalist idol was exhumed, and was "reinstated" in Medina. The capitalist system rapidly struck roots in the Muslim society, and they went so deep that it became impossible to eradicate them. After the death of Muhammad Mustafa, the capitalist system went on growing stronger and stronger.

All members of the panel appointed by Umar to select a khalifa, were capitalists except Ali. They knew that if Ali took charge of the government, he would strike the death blow to the capitalist system; would compel the capitalists to disgorge all the pelf they had already devoured, and would revive the pristine simplicity and purity of the Islamic society just as it was in the times of Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of God. The king-maker and the nouveaux riches had no desire to return to those days of austerity and self-denial.

But even if Umar had not wished to make Uthman his successor, and even if he had no preference for any candidate, and even if there had

been no collusion between Abdur Rahman, the king-maker, and Amr bin Aas, Ali still could not become the caliph. One thing all members of the electoral committee, and many other Muslims who made up the new aristocracy of the Arabs, dreaded most was to see a stern, firm and strong person like Ali at the helm of affairs. They also knew that Ali, inflexible with himself in matters of principle, would be inflexible with them, and that he would compel the whole umma to live in obedience to the imperatives of Qur'an. But Uthman's style, manner, and performance, on the other hand, had been undeviatingly consistent in being so banal that they could be depended upon to confer mediocrity upon the khilafat. His mediocrity was going to be a guarantee that he would not tamper with the privileges and prerogatives of the electors. Safeguarding their interests, therefore, was more important for them than safeguarding the interests of Islam.

The merits of a candidate for the most important office in Islam did not figure anywhere in the king-maker's consideration. The truth is that the interests of Islam or the merits of a candidate were the least important factors in his calculations. His decision was dictated, not by the interests of Islam, but by his interest in the maintenance of the status quo. The tug inside the electoral committee, therefore, encompassed a trial of strength between the capitalist system and the Islamic socio-economic egalitarianism. Ali did what he could to defend egalitarianism but the odds were overwhelmingly against him.

Uthman's election as khalifa was a triumph of capitalism. Umar had conceived the plan of "Shura" (electoral committee), and he had charged Abdur Rahman bin Auf with the duty of implementing it. The latter, as chairman of the committee, made it a condition-precedent that a candidate for khilafat would obey not only the Book of God and would follow the Sunna of His Messenger, but also, would follow the regulations of Abu Bakr and Umar. He thus put the deeds of Abu Bakr and Umar at par with the Book of God and the Sunna of His Apostle.

Ali refused to equate the deeds of Abu Bakr and Umar with the Book of God and the Sunna of His Messenger. He refused to follow fallible men who were the political leaders of his time knowing that his refusal would cost him the throne of the empire of the Muslims. He spurned at that throne because the price being demanded from him for it, was a compromise with Truth and Justice. He declared publicly that the

precedents of Abu Bakr and Umar were not acceptable to him. If their precedents were unacceptable to him, then their caliphate also must have been unacceptable to him. This is conclusive proof that he did not take the oath of allegiance to them. But if Sunnis still insist that Abu Bakr and Umar obtained the pledge of loyalty from him, then they must have taken it from him on the point of the bayonet.

Ali could have declared, just as Uthman did, that he was accepting the king-maker's conditions, and after taking the reins of power in his hand, he could have ignored them, again, just as Uthman did. Many politicians consider double-talk and double-cross a normal and recognized exercise in the game of stagecraft. But Ali did not. For him the ends did not justify the means. For him the means also had to be just as honorable and fair as the ends themselves.

Ali's Protest

Ali said to the king-maker:

"It is not the first time that you have deprived the heirs and the children of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, of their rights through treachery. For this you are answerable to God. But for me, it is better to put my trust in God Who alone is Just, Fair and Merciful."

The king-maker made some attempt at window-dressing for his role in the same manner as Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah had done after Abu Bakr's election in Saqifa but it was not long before he was cursing himself for his chicanery and duplicity in a matter upon which the future of Islam itself had depended.

Abdur Rahman bin Auf, the husband of Uthman's sister, lived long enough to see the fruits of his labors at kingmaking. He saw graft spreading its tentacles like an octopus over the empire of the Muslims, and he was "shocked" so much by the nepotism and the incompetence of the khalifa he had chosen that he declared that he would not talk with him (there was little else he could do then). Sometime later, when he lay dying, Uthman came to see him but he did not acknowledge his greetings and turned his face toward the wall. He died in this state, without exchanging a word with the khalifa. Dr. Taha Husain of Egypt says in his book, al-Fitna-tul-Kubra (the Great Upheaval) that Abdur Rahman bin Auf died full of shame and remorse at what he had done as chairman of Umar's electoral committee.

The Protest of Ammar ibn Yasir

Ammar ibn Yasir, the companion and the beloved of Muhammad Mustafa, reproached Abdur Rahman and his cronies, saying:

"You have usurped the rights of the family of your Prophet, not once but repeatedly, and you have bestowed them upon people who are most unworthy."

Abu Sufyan's Congratulations to Uthman

When Uthman became khalifa, the happiness of the Banu Umayya knew no limits. Life for them, they knew, would be all cream and peaches thenceforth, and it was. Their leader, Abu Sufyan, now 90-years old and blind, came to congratulate the new khalifa, and gave him the following advice:

"It is after a long time that khilafat has come to us. Now kick it around like a ball, and use it to strengthen Banu Umayya. This new power which you now have in your hands, is everything. It is the only reality. Nothing else is real or important. Heaven and hell are nothing."

Abu Sufyan's "advice" to Uthman was the standard reflex to Islam of the Banu Umayya, and it was to remain unchanged throughout the century of their political domination except in the three and half years of the khilafat of Umar bin Abdul Aziz (R).

The selection of Uthman as khalifa once again underscored the truth of the adage that where there's money, there's power.

(Charles E. Hurwitz is a corporate raider who buys American companies and then strips their assets to pay his takeover debt. He rules a financial empire worth an estimated $8.5 billion in 1990. He once drained $60 million from the pension fund of the employees of a mill. To the demoralized employees, he reminded of a "fact of life." He said: "There's a little story about the Golden Rule. Those who have the gold, rule.")

The correlation of economic power and political power is much too patent to need any further delineation or emphasis. Umar chose the

richest men in all Arabia as electors of a khalifa. The only elector who was not rich, was Ali. Umar did not want Ali to become the khalifa but he could not find any plausible reason to exclude him from his electoral committee. Excluding Ali would have made his hatred of and hostility to the family and clan of Muhammad Mustafa too obvious.

Umar lived in morbid fear lest Ali became the caliph of the Muslims. Once it was reported to him that someone had said that after his (Umar's) death, he would acknowledge Ali as caliph. This greatly alarmed Umar, and he immediately warned the Muslims against doing so.

John Alden Williams

(Umar said) "I am about to say to you something which God has willed that I should say. He who understands and heeds it, let him take it with him whithersoever he goes. I have heard that someone said, ‘If Umar were dead, I would hail so-and-so' (i.e. Ali - Editor)." (Themes of Islamic Civilization, p. 61, 1971)

Just before his death, Umar had summoned Abdur Rahman bin Auf to his chamber for a private meeting. It is not known what did they talk about because Umar is said to have exacted a pledge from Abdur Rahman that he would keep the subject of the matters discussed a top secret which the latter did.

Calling upon President Nixon to resign from the presidency, following the Watergate investigations in Washington D.C., Senator James L. Buckley (Republican) of New York, said on March 19, 1974:

"The character of a regime always reflects and expresses the character of its leader, and the leader's aides and agents do what they sense and believe he wants them to do."

Umar's aides and agents did exactly what they "sensed" and believed he wanted them to do. Some years earlier, Uthman bin Affan had filled the position of private secretary to Abu Bakr. He was writing Abu Bakr's will and testament when the former was on his deathbed. Abu Bakr had just begun to dictate, and Uthman had written only the words, "In the name of Allah, Most Merciful and Most Beneficent. I, Abu Bakr,

successor of Muhammad, the Apostle of God … " when he (Abu Bakr) lost consciousness. But before he regained consciousness, Uthman himself added the words: "… appoint Umar as my successor and your ruler," and thus completed the sentence.

Uthman "sensed" and knew exactly what Abu Bakr would have wished him to do. He went ahead and did it. His action won the approval of Abu Bakr when he recovered consciousness.

Abdur Rahman bin Auf "sensed" and knew exactly what Umar wished him to do, and he did it. Endowed with perception as he was, he could read all the signals in the policy lines of Umar!

Uthman bin Affan, the Third Khalifa of the Muslims, 644-656

Uthman bin Affan belonged to the clan of Umayya. He is said to have accepted Islam through the efforts of Abu Bakr, and was one of the early converts. He was one of the richest men in Makkah.

Uthman did not take part in the battle of Badr, and stayed in Medina.

Uthman was present in the battle of Uhud but ran away to save his life when the Muslims were defeated. Some of the fugitives returned to Medina but not Uthman. Shaikh Muhammad el-Khidhri Buck of Egypt writes in his book, Noor al-Yaqeen fi Seeret Sayyed al-Mursaleen (Cairo, p.138, 1953) that Uthman was extremely bashful and it was his bashfulness that prevented him from entering Medina.

During the negotiations of Hudaybiyya, the Prophet sent Uthman as his messenger to the Quraysh in Makkah. The reason he sent him, was that Umar had refused to go, and had pointed to him as a better envoy for the mission, knowing that he (Uthman) was Abu Sufyan's darling, and would, therefore, be safe from any harm. His selection had nothing to do with his fitness for the job.

Uthman is said to have taken a leading part to equip the expedition to Tabuk. In Medina, he is said to have bought a well and endowed it to the community.

During his caliphate, Uthman collected the verses of Qur’an, and published it as the official version of God's last message to mankind. There were other copies also extant but he seized them and burned them.

Uthman's forerunners in the government of Saqifa were Abu Bakr and Umar. Though Abu Bakr and Umar had not accomplished anything particularly remarkable in the lifetime of Muhammad, after his death they proved themselves to be men of extraordinary ability. But Uthman, on the other hand, was a man of compelling mediocrity, both before and after he ascended the throne of his two predecessors. Apart from making some financial contribution to some community effort, he never did anything to distinguish him from the rank and file.

Uthman was already superannuated, being past 72, when he became khalifa. But in his case, superannuating was not a handicap. It was, in fact, one of his few assets. The electors were groaning under the iron discipline imposed upon them by Umar; he had curtailed many of their freedoms. Now that he was dead, they had no intention of returning to those days of stress, and they wanted to enjoy their freedom. They, therefore, opted for a weak and aged khalifa whose grip on government, they knew, would always be loose.

Uthman's selection as khalifa, was an inevitable reaction against the excessive rigors of the times of Umar.

Uthman narrated 146 traditions of the Prophet of Islam.

Uthman's Marriages

At one time there were three girls living in the household of Khadija. Their names were Zainab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom. Zainab, the eldest of the three, was married to one Abul-'As ibn er-Rabi' of Makkah. This man fought against the Prophet in the battle of Badr, and was captured by the Muslims. To ransom his freedom, his wife sent to the Prophet, a necklace which at one time had belonged to Khadija, and she had given it to her as a present on her marriage. Abul-'As was set free; he returned to Makkah, and sent Zainab to Medina as he had promised to do. Zainab, however, died soon after her arrival in Medina. Later, Abul-'As also went to Medina, accepted Islam, and lived with the Muslims.

The other two girls, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom, were married to Utba and Utaiba, the sons of Abu Lahab and Umm Jameel. Umm Jameel was the sister of Abu Sufyan, the chief of the clan of Umayya. Abu Sufyan, therefore, was the maternal uncle of Utba and Utaiba.

It is not known with any degree of certainty who were these three girls. Most of the Sunni historians claim that they were the daughters of Muhammad and Khadija. According to some other historians, they were the daughters of Khadija by an earlier marriage.

The Shia Muslims disagree. They assert that Zainab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom were not the daughters of Muhammad and Khadija; in fact, they were not even the daughters of Khadija by any earlier marriage; they were the daughters of a (widowed) sister of Khadija. Khadija's sister also died, and upon her death, she brought the three girls into her own house and brought them up as her own children.

According to the Shia Muslims, Muhammad and Khadija had three and not six children.The first two of them – Qasim and Tayyeb or Tahir – were boys, and both of them died in their infancy. Their third and the last child was a girl – Fatima Zahra. She was their only child who did not die in infancy.

The girls – Zainab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom – could not have been the daughters of the Prophet of Islam. If they were, he would not have given them in marriage to the idolaters which the husbands of all three of them were. It's true that all three girls were married long before the dawn of Islam. But then he did not violate any of the imperatives of Qur'an at any time – before or after he was ordained God's Messenger. And Qur'an is explicit on the prohibition of the marriage of a Muslim woman to a pagan.

The proscription of the marriage of a Muslim woman and a polytheist occurs in the following verses of Qur'an:

Do not marry (your girls) to unbelievers. (Chapter 2; verse 221)

They (believing women) are not lawful (wives) for the unbelievers, nor are the (unbelievers) lawful (husbands) for them. (Chapter 60; verse 10)

There are other verses in Qur'an which, without referring specifically to marriage, make it impossible for a Muslim to give his daughter or daughters to an idolater. Some of them are:

… the curse of God is on those without faith. (Chapter 2; verse 89)

… God is an enemy to those who reject faith. (Chapter 2, verse 98)

O ye who believe! Truly the pagans are unclean. (Chapyrt 9:verse 28)

Can a Muslim, even if he is a "marginal" or a "statistical" Muslim, believe that Muhammad, the Bringer and the Interpreter of Qur'an, would

give his daughters to those men whom God has cursed; whose enemy He is; and who are unclean?

To a believer, the verses of Qur'an quoted above, are incontrovertible proof that Zainab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom, all three married, at one time, to three idolaters in Makkah, were not the daughters of Muhammad Mustafa and Khadija.

It should also be noted that the Apostle who was very fond of children, never said anything about Zainab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom. The parents give the same love to all their children, and do not make any distinction between them. But he was bestowing encomiums only upon his daughter, Fatima Zahra. Judging by the traditions, he was not even aware that three women called Zainab, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom existed.

Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom were still living with their husbands when a new revelation, the Chapter 111 of Qur'an, came from Heaven. In this chapter Abu Lahab and his wife, Umm Jameel, the in-laws of Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom, were cursed for their perversity.

The new revelation roused the anger of the old couple, and they ordered their sons to divorce their wives, and to send them back to Khadija's home. The boys obeyed their parents, divorced their wives and they (the wives) returned to Khadija's home. Sometime later, Ruqayya was married to Uthman bin Affan. She died in A.D. 624. After her death, her sister, Umm Kulthoom, was also married to Uthman. She died a few years later.

The years in Makkah, after the proclamation of Islam, and the early years in Medina, were fraught with peril for Muhammad. Everyday brought new challenges to him. He put his life in the line of fire as soon as he stepped out of his house. And yet, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom are never mentioned as giving any service to their father. On the other hand, Fatima Zahra helped her father in various emergencies, both in Makkah and Medina. Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom both were many years older than Fatima, and they ought to have cheered and comforted their father whenever he was oppressed by the idolaters in Makkah or was wounded in battles in Medina but they never did.

The Sunni historians have bestowed upon Uthman the grandiloquent title of Dhun-Noorayn which means "the owner of two lights," because he married, according to them, two daughters of the Prophet, an honor not attained even by Abu Bakr and Umar!

Uthman became the owner of two lights after marrying Ruqayya and Umm Kulthoom. But both of these girls were married to two idolaters, i.e., Utba and Utaiba, the sons of Abu Lahab, before they were married to Uthman. Therefore, each of the two sons of Abu Lahab ought to be called Dhun-Noor – the owner of one light. Each of them, Utba and Utaiba, was the owner of one light which he passed on to Uthman, thus making him the owner of two lights. After all, the lights remained the same; only the ownership changed!

Principal Events of the Caliphate of Uthman

In A.D. 645, there were rebellions in the provinces of Azerbaijan and Armenia, and they were quelled.

In 647, Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan, Uthman's governor in Syria, invaded Asia Minor and captured Ammuria.

In 648, Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, Uthman's governor in Egypt, captured Tripoli in Libya.

Both Muawiya and Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh built fleets and challenged the naval power of the Byzantine in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In 649, Muawiya's fleet conquered Cyprus.

In 651, Uthman's generals conquered Herat in Afghanistan.

In 652, the first official copy of Al-Qur'an al-Majid was published in Medina, and its copies were distributed in all provinces.

In 652-54, Abdullah bin Aamir, Uthman's governor in Basra, sent his general, Abdur Rahman bin Samra, to the east, where he conquered Balkh in Khurasan, and Kabul and Ghazni in Afghanistan. These new conquests made the empire of the Muslims contiguous with the sub-continent of Indo-Pakistan.

Favoritism and Nepotism in the Khilafat of Uthman

Uthman loved the members of his own clan, the Banu Umayya, to a point where his love became an obsession. The Umayyads were the arch-

enemies of Islam, and they had fought against its Prophet for more than two decades. Now suddenly, Uthman made them masters of the empire of the Muslims. He himself became their puppet, and they took the reins of the government in their own hands. The real rulers of the empire, in the khilafat of Uthman, were Marwan (the cousin and son-in-law of Uthman) and Hakam bin Abul-Aas (Uthman's uncle and Marwan's father).

Uthman opened the gates of the public treasury to his relatives. He gave them rich presents, vast estates and high ranks. Then, as if he had not done enough for them, he forbade the citizens of Medina to graze their camels and cattle in the pastures around the city. These pastures had been made a public endowment by the Prophet but according to the new ordinance of Uthman, only those animals could graze in them which belonged either to himself or to the Banu Umayya. The Prophet had told the Muslims that all those lands which were irrigated by rain, were the property of the whole umma, and therefore, the animals of all its members could graze in them. He had also told them that these lands could not be appropriated by anyone for private use as was done in the Times of Ignorance.

Al-Qur’an al-Majid has told the story of Prophet Saleh in its seventh chapter (Al-'Araf - the Heights). According to this story, the haughty and the mighty of the times of the Prophet, Saleh, prevented the access of the humble and the weak people and their cattle, to the springs. It was only through the intervention of Saleh that the latter could obtain water from the springs. Like water, pasture was also considered to be a free gift of God to His creatures but the arrogant ones denied it to them. What was done in the times of Saleh by the rich and the powerful of the Thamud, was now being done in Medina by the rich and the powerful of that city – the Umayyads. They formed the new clique, grasping all the levers of power.

The government in Medina had become an inter-locking directorate of the cousins, the in-laws and the other relatives of Uthman. Other Muslims had no share in it. Principal figures in the "directorate" were:

Hakam bin Abul Aas

Hakam was Uthman's uncle. In Makkah, he was one of the neighbors of Muhammad, and was one of his tormentors. He made a mockery of the Word of God, and ridiculed His Messenger.

In 630 the Apostle captured Makkah whereupon Hakam, his son Marwan and many other Umayyads "accepted" Islam. But Hakam and his son could never overcome their animosity to Islam and its Prophet. If they could hurt Islam, they did. Eventually, the Prophet banished them from Medina. When he died, and Abu Bakr became khalifa, Uthman requested him to allow his uncle and his son-in-law to return to Medina but he refused. When Umar became khalifa, Uthman begged him to let the two pariahs come back to Medina but he too refused. Then Uthman became khalifa, and he, of course, lost no time in bringing them back to Medina, and in bestowing the greatest honors upon them. Yaqoobi, the historian, says that when Hakam entered Medina, he was wearing dirty tatters like a beggar but when he left Uthman's palace, he was dressed in the richest silks and brocade.

Uthman appointed Hakam as collector of the poor-tax from the tribe of Banu Qaza'a. Baladhuri, the historian, says that Hakam collected 300,000 dirhems and when he brought it to the khalifa, the latter gave it back to him to keep and to spend.

Yaqoobi has quoted a certain Abdur Rahman ibn Yasir in his history as follows:

An officer's duty was to collect taxes from the merchants of the markets in Medina. One evening I noticed that Uthman, the khalifa, came to him, and asked him to pay to Hakam all the money which he had collected that day. It was Uthman's practice to bestow gifts from the public treasury to members of his family. The tax collector tried to fob off Uthman and said that he would pay when he had collected all the dues. But Uthman said to him: "You are my treasurer, and do what I tell you to do." The collector retorted that he was the treasurer neither of Uthman nor of his relatives but only of the Muslims. On the following morning, the same officer came into the Mosque, and addressing the congregation, said: "O Muslims! Uthman says that I am his treasurer. I am not. I am the treasurer of the Muslims. I do not want to be his treasurer." He then threw the keys of the treasury before Uthman, and walked out. Uthman picked up the keys, and gave them to Zayd bin Thabit.

Marwan bin al-Hakam

Marwan was Hakam's son and Uthman's first cousin. He was married to Uthman's daughter, Umm Aban.

Marwan was Uthman's "prime minister." He distributed gifts from the public treasury to whomsoever he pleased, and he distributed positions of authority in the government to his favorites. He also kept the privy seal of the khalifa in his possession and made free use and abuse of it. Uthman was in his grip, and acted upon his advice blindly.

After a successful campaign in Africa, one of Uthman's generals sent the spoils of war to him in Medina. This was estimated to be a half-million pieces of gold. Uthman gave all of it to Marwan.

Baladhuri, the historian, has quoted Abdullah bin Zubayr as follows:

"In 27 Hijri, Uthman sent us to the front in Africa. His foster brother, Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, was the general of the army. He captured vast quantities of booty; kept four-fifths of it for the army, and sent one-fifth to Uthman in Medina. Uthman gave it all to Marwan."

On another occasion, Uthman gave his son-in-law four million dirhems out of the public treasury. He also made the estate of Fadak a gift to him.

Marwan was to reveal himself one of the most rapacious grafters in the khilafat of Uthman, and manifested a vampire-like mentality of extortion.

Harith bin al-Hakam

Harith, the younger brother of Marwan, was married to the second daughter of Uthman. He received a gift of 300,000 dirhems from the treasury. Baladhuri says that once some camels were sent to the khalifa as part of the poor-tax, and he gave them to Harith.

Abdullah bin Khalid

Abdullah bin Khalid was another of Uthman's sons-in-law. When he gave him his daughter, he ordered Abdullah bin Aamir, his governor in Basra, to pay him (Abdullah bin Khalid) 600,000 dirhems from the public treasury.

Walid bin Aqaba

Walid was the son of Aqaba bin Abi Mu'ait. Aqaba was the first or second husband of the mother of Uthman. In Makkah, he was also a neighbor of Muhammad, and like Umm Jameel, he too collected garbage and threw it at his door. He fought against the Prophet at Badr, was captured, and upon his orders, was executed.

Walid and his brothers – the siblings of Uthman – accepted Islam when Makkah was conquered.

On one occasion, the Prophet sent Walid to the tribe of Banu Mustalaq to collect taxes. He left Medina but soon came back and told the Prophet that the Banu Mustalaq had repudiated Islam, and had refused to pay their taxes.

The Prophet was surprised to hear this. But before he could investigate the matter, the leaders of Banu Mustalaq themselves arrived in Medina to pay their taxes. They assured the Prophet that they were sincere Muslims. Walid had never visited them.

It was after this incident that the following verse was revealed to the Messenger of God:

O ye who believe! If a fasiq (wicked person) comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done. (Chapter 49; verse 6)

It was the Book of God which called Walid a fasiq, and it was by this name that he was known ever-after.

Umar bin al-Khattab had told Uthman that if he became khalifa, he should appoint Saad bin Abi Waqqas the governor of Kufa. Uthman became khalifa, and he appointed Saad governor of Kufa as per Umar's wish. But within a year, Uthman dismissed Saad and appointed Walid in his place as the new governor.

As soon as Walid found himself in control of the rich province, he became drunk, both with power and with wine. He was a compulsive drinker. He was drunk even when he led the Muslims in prayer. One morning he entered the mosque in a state of drunkenness. He led the prayer, and then vomited in the alcove of the mosque. The reports on his

drunkenness became so persistent that even Uthman was unable to turn a blind eye on them, and he was compelled to recall him to Medina. In his stead, Uthman appointed Saeed bin Aas as the new governor of Kufa.

Saeed bin Aas

Saeed's father, a rabid enemy of the Apostle of God, was killed in the battle of Badr. After his death, Uthman adopted his son, and brought him up in his own home. In 30 Hijri Uthman dismissed Walid and appointed Saeed the new governor of Kufa. He also gave him a present of 100,000 dirhems from the state treasury.

Like other members of his clan, Saeed also considered public funds as his private wealth, and spent them as he pleased. If anyone protested, he silenced him with his "police" powers. He could get any man beaten up and he could get anyone's house burned down.

The governors were plundering every province in the empire. They seemed to have the tacit blessing if not the explicit encouragement of the khalifa. Inevitably, agitation began to simmer and smolder. Uthman was told that someday there would be an explosion. Alarmed by the growing discontent and the crescendo of protests, he convened a conference of all his governors. They came, gave him some perfunctory advice, and dispersed. Saeed bin Aas was also among them. But after the conference when he returned to Kufa, the citizens of that city stopped him near Qadsiyya, and told him that they would not let him enter Kufa. He could not enter Kufa, and went back to Medina. In his place, Uthman appointed Abu Musa al-Ashari as the new governor.

Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh

This Abdullah was the foster-brother of Uthman. His father, Saad bin Abi Sarh, was one of the munafiqeen in Medina.

Abdullah, at one time, was one of the secretaries of the Prophet. When the latter dictated to him any verse of Qur'an, he distorted it by changing its diacritical marks or the letters or the words. Soon he was caught and the Prophet banished him from Medina. He repudiated Islam, went to Makkah, and began to spread the story that Muhammad himself made

up the verses of Qur’an, and claimed that they are revelations from Heaven.

When Makkah was conquered, the Prophet ordered that Abdullah should be executed as an apostate even if he was in the Kaaba itself. But Uthman managed to conceal him in his own house. Later, when conditions became normal, he brought him before the Prophet and said that he sought pardon and also wished to take the oath of loyalty. But the Prophet did not put out his hand, and maintained a studied silence for a considerable time. Uthman importuned him to pardon Abdullah. Eventually, he pardoned him. But as soon as Uthman and Abdullah were out of his sight, he turned to those around him, and said: "I was silent for such a long time hoping that one of you would kill him." Baladhuri writes in his book, Ansab-ul-Ashraf (p. 358):

"The Apostle said: ‘Was there no one among you who would kill this dog before he got a pardon?'

Umar bin al-Khattab answered: ‘O Messenger of God, if you had signaled to us, we would have killed him.' The Apostle said: ‘I could not signal to you. Doing so would be unworthy of me.'"

When Uthman became khalifa, he appointed Abdullah the governor of Egypt. With his appointment, a reign of tyranny and exploitation began in Egypt. The fortunes of Egypt turned into misfortunes; prosperity turned into adversity. Everyone turned against the new governor. The latter also ran afoul of Muhammad ibn Hudhaifa.

Muhammad's father, Hudhaifa, was one of the earliest converts to Islam. He died fighting in the battle of Yarmok. At his death, Uthman took charge of Muhammad, his young son, and brought him up. When he grew up, he sought permission to go to the foreign wars. Uthman allowed him to accompany Abdullah bin Saad to Egypt as one of his aides.

Muhammad bin Hudhaifa was a very pious and God-fearing man, and spent most of his time in devotions. When graft and corruption reared their head in the administration, he admonished Abdullah, and urged him to restore good government. But Abdullah did not respond to sincere admonition. Nevertheless, Muhammad persisted in his efforts to reform him. Abdullah, however, appeared to have, like Marwan, a streak

of perversity in his character, and took pleasure in doing just what he was forbidden to do.

Eventually, Muhammad gave up hope. From a friendly and sympathetic admonisher, he turned into a disillusioned and a bitter critic – first of Abdullah bin Saad, and later of Uthman himself for appointing as governor of Egypt an apostate whose execution had been ordered by the Apostle of God himself.

The people of Egypt loved Muhammad ibn Hudhaifa for his uprightness and his courage in criticizing the errant governor, and they rallied round him. Abdullah wrote to Uthman that the young man he (Uthman) had brought up, was spreading sedition against the government, and that if nothing was done to stop him, the situation would get out of hand.

Uthman did not know what to do. It occurred to him that he might silence Muhammad's protests with gold and silver. He, therefore, sent to him 30,000 dirhems and many expensive pieces of fabrics as a present. This gambit, unfortunately for Uthman, backfired upon him. Muhammad brought the money and the material into the great mosque, piled them on the ground before the Muslims, and said:

"O Muslims! Do you see what Uthman is trying to do? He is trying to buy my Faith. He has sent these coins and these goods to me as a bribe." (Tarikh Kamil: Kamil ibn Atheer, Vol.3, p.135)

Uthman wrote many placatory letters to Muhammad, and reminded him that he was under a debt of gratitude to him. But Muhammad ignored them, and the agitation against Abdullah bin Saad went on gathering momentum.

The leaders of the Egyptian Muslims held a meeting at which they decided to send a delegation to Medina to demand from Uthman the dismissal of Abdullah bin Saad.

After the departure of the Egyptian delegation, the position of Abdullah became rather untenable. Fearful of revolution, he too left Egypt for Medina, partly, to defend himself at the court of the khalifa. In his absence, Muhammad ibn Hudhaifa took charge of the government.

When Abdullah reached Elath, he heard that Uthman's palace was under siege, and that he was confined to it. He figured that it would not be safe for him to go to Medina, and he decided to return to Egypt. But at the border, he was informed that Muhammad ibn Hudhaifa had given orders to stop him, and not to let him reenter Egypt. Thereupon, he went to Palestine awaiting the outcome of events in Medina. In the meantime, Uthman was killed in Medina, and when Abdullah heard the news, he left Palestine, and went to Damascus to live under the protection of Muawiya.

New Governors of the Provinces

Kufa

During the first year of Uthman's caliphate, Saad bin Abi Waqqas was the governor of Kufa. Then Uthman dismissed him, and appointed his own half-brother, Walid bin Aqaba, as the new governor of Kufa.

Basra

Umar had appointed Abu Musa al-Ashari as the governor of Basra. Uthman dismissed him, and appointed his own cousin, Abdullah bin Aamir, as the new governor.

Syria

Umar had appointed Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan as his governor of Syria. Uthman confirmed him as his governor in that province.

Egypt

Amr bin Aas had conquered Egypt, and Umar had appointed him its governor. Uthman dismissed him, and in his stead, he appointed his own foster-brother, Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh. This man was an apostate, and the Prophet had ordered his execution but had suspended the sentence when Uthman pleaded for him. Thus Uthman first saved the life of an apostate and then made him a governor over the Muslims.

Modern Historians and the Caliphate of Uthman

Following is the report of some of the modern historians on graft, corruption, nepotism and abuse of power in the time of Uthman, the third khalifa of the Muslims.

The undisguised plunder of the Moslem treasury met with protests from those few companions of the Prophet who deemed that all receipts belonged to the Moslems and should be divided equally between them. The most outstanding of these opponents of inequality of wealth was Abu-Dharr al-Ghiffari. In the period of conquest, this old ‘companion' whom, according to tradition, Mohammed set as an example to other Moslems, had gone to Syria where he publicly decried the viceroy and the war leaders for appropriating booty and tribute which in his opinion was ‘the property of Allah,' belonging to all Moslems (p. 143).

Moawiya asked the Caliph Uthman to remove this dangerous agitator, who was becoming increasingly popular among the rank-and-file, from Syria. Recalled by Uthman, Abu-Dharr settled in Medina, but, on learning there that the caliph had given generous gifts out of the Moslem treasury to his nephew (sic) and son-in-law, Marwan ibn al-Hakam, while granting 300,000 dirhems from the same source to another nephew, Harith ibn al-Hakam, and 100,000 dirhems to one Zaid ibn Thabit, he began to criticize him sharply, promising all four, on the strength of Qur’an, punishment in the flames of Hell.

Pursuing his criticism, this irreconcilable and incorruptible tribune (Abu-Dharr) declared that rich men increase their riches by despoiling the poor. The caliph ordered the "trouble-maker" deported to an out-of-the-way place, where he died in extreme poverty, leaving his widow without even the means to pay for his modest burial.

During the rule of Uthman, his relatives, members of the Meccan slave-holding aristocracy, seized governmental posts and landed estates in the conquered countries. Historical tradition assigns a particularly pernicious role to the caliph's nephew and son-in-law, Marwan, who, profiting from his father-in-law's senility, took over the actual power of government in Medina and connived in every way with the arbitrary deeds of his avid, plundering relatives. These kin of the caliph, members of the Umayya clan, had been appointed by Uthman as viceroys and war leaders; they appropriated those lands considered the property of the Moslem community.

Such seizures of land, together with the spoliation, blackmail and violence committed by these rulers, gave rise to a growing discontent, expressed most forcefully by those friends of Omar who had been displaced from their influential and lucrative positions. Their displeasure was shared by Arab tribes (especially in Irak) whose material interests suffered from the arbitrary dissipation of state funds at the hands of Uthman's appointees.

The Caliph Uthman himself set the example of misuse of governmental receipts for the benefit of his own family; when his daughter was married to Abdullah ibn Khalid, for instance, Uthman granted them 600,000 dirhems out of the Basra bait-ul-mal, while when Abdullah ibn Sarh sent 3000 qanatir of gold from Ifriqiya, he ordered this gold to be given to the family of al-Hakam (p. 144). (Arabs, Islam & the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages, New York, 1969)

Sir John Glubb

In 646 Osman appointed his half-brother, Waleed ibn Uqba, governor of Kufa. His father, Uqba, had been taken prisoner at Bedr fighting for Quraish and had been condemned to death by the Prophet himself. To his anguished cry, "Who will take care of my little children?" Mohammed had replied coldly, "hell fire." The new governor of Kufa was one of those little children whom the Apostle of God himself consigned to the infernal regions. Waleed also had a reputation for insobriety. Criticism of Osman's appointments was growing in volume. His foster brother, Ibn Abi Sarh, had been made governor of Egypt, though the Prophet had pronounced him worthy of death for apostasy… (pp. 290-291)

In the Islamic theocracy the state was not an impersonal organization but (in theory at least) the chosen instrument of God. No sophistry could justify a man preferring the material interests of his relatives to the service of God Himself.

The manifest impiety of many of Osman's nominees, and the fact that they or their fathers had been the bitterest opponents of the Prophet, offended the many sincerely religious Muslims in Mecca and Medina. The companions were still fairly numerous, not to mention the men who had fought at Bedr and Uhud, or who had sworn the oath of the Tree between the hands of the Apostle of God at Hudaybiyya. All these now

saw the theocracy of Islam ruled by the Prophet's enemies, who likewise enjoyed those earthly rewards which were the proper guerdon of the faithful believers. (p. 297).

An example of what the strict Muslims felt about the age of Osman is provided by the case of Abu Dharr. This man had been an early convert and had lived out his life as a genuine ascetic. He now, first in Damascus and then in Medina, began to preach sermons denouncing the demoralization of the times. In Syria, in Iraq, and even in Medina, the leading Muslims lived in marble palaces, surrounded by slaves and concubines, clad in luxurious clothing and indulging in sumptuous food. There can be no doubt that Abu Dharr was right in his charge that all this wealth and luxury was undermining the former hardy and frugal Arab virtues. But the rulers of the empire alleged that his words were inciting the people to revolt, and Osman decreed his banishment to a lonely oasis in Central Arabia. There two years later, he died in want, and his memory was soon venerated as that of a saint. (The Great Arab Conquests, London, 1963)

Uthman and the Friends of Muhammad, the Messenger of God

If Uthman could not lavish enough love upon such enemies of Muhammad Mustafa and Islam as Hakam, Marwan, Walid and Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, he also could not expend enough animosity upon such true believers, lovers of God, and sincere friends of Muhammad Mustafa, as Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir and Abdullah ibn Masood. Their story will make this point clear.

Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari

It was reported to Uthman that Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari had spoken before the Muslims in the Mosque as follows:

"I am Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, companion of Muhammad, the Last Messenger of God. Allah has elevated Adam, Noah and the children of Abraham and Imran over and above the rest of mankind. Muhammad has inherited the legacy of all these prophets. He combines in his person all their qualities, attributes and achievements. And Muhammad's successor is Ali ibn Abi Talib. O ye Muslims, who are bewildered today, if after the death of your Prophet, you had put him (Ali) ahead of others, as Allah put him ahead of others, and if you had put those men behind whom

Allah has put behind, and if you had left authority and power at its source, i.e., in the house of your Prophet, then you would have received the blessings of Allah. There would not have been any one poor or destitute. Nor any two men would have disagreed on the interpretation of the Message of Allah, and everyone would have carried out his duties toward Him, and toward the other members of the community, as was done in the times of His Messenger himself. You would have found guidance and enlightenment at its fountainhead, i.e., in the house of Muhammad. But you allowed the authority and the power of the house of your Prophet to be usurped, and now you are paying the penalty."

The informers also told Uthman that Abu Dharr was drawing attention of the Muslims to his (Uthman's) deviations from the practices of the Prophet as well as from the practices of Abu Bakr and Umar.

Uthman ordered Abu Dharr to leave Medina, and to go to Syria and to live there.

In Syria, Muawiya had consolidated his position, and he had cultivated a secular instead of an Islamic lifestyle. Abu Dharr witnessed many foul and unIslamic practices at the court of Syria. He noticed that the gold and silver of the province was being squandered in Damascus on the luxuries of the nobles while there were many Muslims who were starving. Muawiya soon learned that Abu Dharr was no less irrepressible in Damascus than he was in Medina. Abu Dharr recited those verses of Qur'an in which the hoarders of wealth are denounced. He was blunt in his criticism and spoke the truth regardless of cost to himself. Muawiya had built a palace for himself. Abu Dharr said to him:

"If you built this palace out of the funds which belong to the Muslims, then you have betrayed a trust; and if you built it from your personal wealth, then you have been guilty of extravagance and vanity."

Abu Dharr told Muawiya and the Syrian nobles that they would be branded in hell with the gold and the silver which they were hoarding.

At last Muawiya's patience reached the breaking point, and he wrote to Uthman:

"I fear that Abu Dharr may incite the people to rebellion. If you do not want rebellion in the country, then you should recall him to Medina immediately."

Uthman agreed. Muawiya mounted Abu Dharr on a camel without a howdah, and he ordered the camel-driver to travel non-stop to Medina.

Abu Dharr arrived in Medina half-dead with wounds, exhaustion and exposure.

But even in this state, Abu Dharr could not acquiesce in falsehood, injustice, exploitation and disobedience to the commandments of God. The love of truth and justice burned in his heart like a flame. If any case of embezzlement came to his attention, he denounced it, and castigated its authors publicly. At last Uthman could take it no more. He summoned Abu Dharr to his court and the following exchange took place between them:

Uthman: I will banish you from Medina.
Abu Dharr: Will you banish me from the city of the Prophet?
Uthman: Yes.
Abu Dharr: Will you send me to Kufa?
Uthman: No.
Abu Dharr: Will you send me to Basra?
Uthman: No.
Abu Dharr: Where else can you send me then?
Uthman: Which is the place that you dislike most?
Abu Dharr: Rabza.
Uthman: That's where I will send you.

Uthman kept his word, and banished Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari to Rabza. He also issued orders that no one should talk with him or walk with him. But Ali came to see him, and to talk and walk with him. With Ali were his own sons, the sons of Aqeel ibn Abi Talib, and his nephew, Abdullah ibn Jafar.

It was a heart-breaking scene. Ali was parting company with his bosom friend, and the friend and beloved of Muhammad Mustafa. His own heart was full of sadness, but he tried to comfort his friend with the following words:

"O Abu Dharr, you were angry with these people because they deviated from the course charted by Allah. Therefore Allah Himself will recompense you. They are afraid of you because they think you might deprive them of their gold and silver. But if you were also like them, they would have become your friends."

Then Husain, the younger grandson of Muhammad Mustafa, turned his misty eyes toward the beloved of his grandfather, now going into exile, and said:

"O my uncle, Allah will change even a time like this. Your enemies have ‘saved' their worldly interests from you but you have saved your Hereafter from them. What they have saved is utterly worthless but what you have saved, is something that will last forever."

Ali and his companions walked in silence with Abu Dharr, and when time came to part, the latter said:
"O poeple of the House of Muhammad! May Allah bless you. Whenever I see you, recollection comes to me of my friend and beloved, Muhammad, the Apostle and beloved of Allah."

Abu Dharr, his wife and his slave, were banished to Rabza in the desert, and sometime later, he died there. His wife and slave covered his face, turned it toward the Kaaba, and sat by the roadside not knowing what to do. Presently, they saw some riders coming from the direction of Iraq. These riders were Abdullah ibn Masood, an old friend of Muhammad, and some other travelers. They were going to Medina. When they saw Abu Dharr's widow, they halted and asked her who she was and what she was doing in that desolate place.

Abu Dharr's slave told them who they were, and informed them that the body of Abu Dharr was lying unburied as the ground was rocky and they were unable to dig a grave.
Abdullah ibn Masood burst into tears and lamented the death of his own friend, and the friend of the Apostle of God.

Abdullah ibn Masood and his companions dug a grave, arranged a simple funeral, said prayers, and buried Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

Burayda b. Sufyan al-Aslami from Muhammad b. Kaaba al-Qurazi from Abdullah b. Masood told me that when Uthman exiled Abu Dharr to Rabza, and his appointed time came, there was no one with him except his wife and a slave. He instructed them to wash his body and to drape it in a shroud, and lay him on the surface of the road, and tell the

first caravan that passed who he was, and ask them to help in burying him. When he died, they did this. Abdullah b. Masood arrived with some other men from Iraq on pilgrimage when they saw the bier on the roadside. The slave rose and said, "This is Abu Dharr, the Apostle's friend. Help us to bury him." Abdullah b. Masood broke out into loud weeping, and said: "The Apostle was right; you walked alone, and you died alone, and you will be raised alone." Then he and his companions dismounted from their camels and buried him, and he told them his story and what the Apostle had said on the road to Tabuk. (The Life of Muhammad)

Dr. Taha Husain

"Abu Dharr was one of the earliest converts to Islam, and he was one of those who were loved and admired by the Prophet himself. The Prophet used to say: "The blue sky never held its canopy over a man who was more truthful than Abu Dharr."

Abu Dharr learned that Uthman gave a lot of money to Marwan bin al-Hakam; and he gave to his brother, Harith bin al-Hakam 300,000 dirhems; and he gave to Zayd bin Thabit Ansari 100,000 dirhems. Abu Dharr criticized all this, and he told the hoarders how they would be burned in hell. He read the verse of Quran: Give tidings of torture to those who hoard gold and silver and do not spend their wealth for the sake of Allah (9:34).

Marwan bin al-Hakam informed Uthman what Abu Dharr was reading. Uthman sent his slave to Abu Dharr and forbade him to read the Qur'anic verse in question. Abu Dharr said: "Does Uthman forbid me to read the Book of Allah, and to forget His commandments? If I have to choose between the pleasure of Allah and the pleasure of Uthman, I shall certainly choose the pleasure of Allah."

Abu Dharr was persistent in his criticism of the hoarders of wealth, and he called upon the Muslims not to be spendthrifts." (al- Fitna-tul-Kubra {The Great Upheaval}, published in Cairo in 1959 p.163)

Abu Dharr struggled against the merchandising school of politics. In Islam, his voice was the first one that rose in protest against religious and political totalitarianism, and economic exploitation, and his was also the first voice to rise in defense of the Muslim "under-dog." His voice was

stifled but his ideals could not be stifled. He lifted his ideals out of Al-Qur'an al-Majid. Any attempt to stifle his ideals is an attempt to stifle Al-Qur'an al-Majid.

Abu Dharr's voice was the voice of the Conscience of Islam, and his platform was the Rights of Man. May God bless him to all eternity.

Ammar ibn Yasir

Ammar ibn Yasser was also one of the earliest converts to Islam. As noted before, his mother and father were tortured to death by the pagans in Makkah. They were the first and the second martyrs of Islam, and this is a distinction that no one in all Islam can share with them. Like Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar was also one of the few favorites of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, who once said:

"Ammar is the embodiment of all Iman (Faith)"

Just like Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari and a few others, Ammar also was not very popular with the brokers of economic and political power of his time, and a head-on collision between him and them was inevitable.

Dr. Taha Husain

"Ammar migrated first to Abyssinia, and then to Medina. He was the first Muslim to build a Mosque. He built it in Makkah itself, and he prayed in it. And he built, with others, the Mosque of the Prophet (in Medina). While other Muslims carried one brick at a time, he carried two. He also dug, with others, the trench at the siege of Medina. He was covered with dust. The Apostle of God himself removed dust from his head and face.

When Ammar heard the news of the death of Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, he mourned for him. Uthman interpreted his lamentations (for Abu Dharr) as a reproach to himself. He was highly incensed, and ordered him also to leave Medina, and to go to Rabza (in exile). When Ammar got ready to leave Medina, the Banu Makhzoom whose client he was, were infuriated. Ali was also displeased. He went to see Uthman, reproved him for banishing Abu Dharr, and told him not to do the same to Ammar. Uthman said to him: "You are no better than Ammar, and you too deserve to be banished from Medina." Ali answered: "Go ahead, and

do that." Then the other Muhajireen intervened and told Uthman that he could not banish everyone with whom he happened to be displeased.

On one occasion, Uthman had taken a piece of jewelry from the treasury for his own family. Among those men who raised objection to this act, was Ammar ibn Yasir. Uthman was beside himself with rage. "How do you dare to question me?" he roared. He then ordered his slaves to seize him. They seized him, and Uthman beat him up brutally until he lost consciousness. He was taken from the mosque in that state to the house of Umm Salma, the widow of the Prophet. Ammar was unconscious the rest of the day. When he regained consciousness at last, he rose, took ablutions, offered his prayers, and said: "Thank Allah, it's not the first time that I have been tortured for speaking the truth." (the first time when Ammar was tortured for upholding the truth of Islam, he was in Makkah. In those days, it was Abu Jahl who tortured him).

On another occasion, some companions of the Prophet drafted a letter of advice to Uthman, and they requested Ammar to present it to him. When Ammar presented the letter to Uthman, he again lost his temper. Once again, he ordered his slaves to knock him down. They knocked him down, and Uthman kicked him in his groin, and beat him up until he fainted." (al- Fitna-tul-Kubra {The Great Upheaval}, published in Cairo in 1959)

Abdullah ibn Masood

Abdullah ibn Masood was one of the principal companions of the Prophet. As noted before, he was the first man who read Qur'an in Kaaba in the presence of the leaders of the Quraysh, and was beaten up by them for doing so. He was one of the most knowledgeable men in Medina. He spent much time in the company of the Prophet, and had more familiarity with his practices and precedents than most of the other companions. It was for this reason that Umar had asked him to be with him at all times. There were many occasions when Umar did not know how the Prophet had solved a problem or had taken a decision in some matter. On such occasions, he consulted Abdullah ibn Masood, and acted upon his advice. In his later years, Umar had appointed him treasurer of Kufa.

Dr. Taha Husain

Abdullah ibn Masood was the treasurer of Kufa when Saad bin Abi Waqqas was its governor. Uthman dismissed Saad, and made Walid bin Aqaba the new governor. Walid took a loan from the treasury. When the stipulated time had passed, and the loan was not returned, Ibn Masood asked him to pay it. He informed Uthman about it. Uthman wrote to him: "You are my treasurer. Do not demand the loan from Walid." Ibn Masood resented this. He threw away the keys of the treasury, and stayed at home.

From that time, Abdullah ibn Masood became a critic of Uthman's fiscal and political policies. Walid wrote to Uthman about him, and the latter asked him (Walid) to send him (Ibn Masood) to Medina.

Ibn Masood arrived in Medina, and went into the Mosque. When he entered the Mosque, Uthman was reading the sermon. When Uthman saw him entering the Mosque, he said: "A foul and despicable beast is coming toward you." Ibn Masood said: "That is not so. I am the companion and friend of the Apostle of God. I fought at Badr, and I am a Companion of the Tree." Ayesha also heard in her chamber what Uthman had said, and she cried out: "Is this the kind of language you use for a companion of the Apostle of God?"

Uthman ordered Abdullah ibn Masood to get out of the Mosque of the Prophet. Uthman's slaves threw him out of the Mosque, and down on the ground breaking his ribs.

Ali rose to upbraid Uthman, and said: "You have hurt a friend of the Apostle merely at a report from Walid. You know that Walid is a liar." He then carried Ibn Masood to his home.

But Uthman was not satisfied with what he had done. After breaking the ribs of Abdullah ibn Masood, he stopped payment of his pension, and forbade him to leave Medina. Ibn Masood wished to go to Syria and to take part in the campaigns but Uthman repeated what he had heard Marwan saying: "He has created enough trouble in Kufa; do not let him do the same in Syria." (p. 160) (al- Fitna-tul-Kubra {The Great Upheaval}, published in Cairo in 1959)

As noted before, Abdullah ibn Masood had made his own collection of the verses of Qur’an, and he had arranged them in chronological order.

But Uthman had appointed his favorite, Zayd bin Thabit, to collect and to arrange the verses of Qur'an. He did not "recognize" the collection of Ibn Masood, and ordered him to surrender his copy. Abdullah ibn Masood refused to do so whereupon the slaves of Uthman broke into his house, and forcibly seized the copy of Qur'an from him. This copy was burned at Uthman's orders.

Uthman used the powers of state in dealing with men like Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir and Abdullah ibn Masood because they refused to compromise with their principles. All three of them had to pay a penalty for this refusal but they gladly paid it.

Uthman, however, also tangled with some of those men who were not too finicky about such things as principles. Among them were Abdur Rahman bin Auf and Amr bin Aas. Both of them were directly responsible for his accession to the throne.

Uthman and the King-makers

Uthman ought to be grateful to these two men who had made him khalifa of the Muslims. But if he was grateful to them, he did not show it. Instead of showing gratitude to them, he cruelly disillusioned one of them, and he made the other an implacable enemy for himself.

Abdur Rahman bin Auf

When Muslims lost all hope that Uthman would mend his ways, they turned, in sheer frustration, to Abdur Rahman bin Auf; told him that nothing in Dar-ul-Islam was right, everything was going wrong, and the responsibility for this state was entirely his since it was he who had made Uthman a khalifa.

Abdur Rahman admitted that what he had done was wrong, and he added:

"I never expected such shameful conduct from Uthman. He has disappointed us. And now let God be a Witness that I will never talk with him again."

Abdur Rahman's refusal to talk with Uthman could not undo the harm that had been done nor could it change anything for anyone. But he upheld his "principle" and did not talk with Uthman to show him how he resented his (Uthman's) deeds.

Amr bin Aas

Amr bin Aas had conquered Egypt on his own initiative. After the conquest, he was appointed Egypt's governor by Umar. Some time before his own death, Umar had sent Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, the foster-brother of Uthman, to Egypt, to share fiscal responsibility with Amr bin Aas.

When Umar died and Uthman became khalifa, Abdullah bin Saad wrote to him that Amr bin Aas was manipulating public funds. Uthman immediately dismissed Amr, and made Abdullah the new governor and commander-in-chief of the army in Egypt.

After Amr's dismissal, the Byzantine emperor sent a fleet to Egypt which succeeded in capturing Alexandria in A.D. 646. Abdullah bin Saad could not defend the province, and Uthman was forced to reinstate Amr as governor and commander-in-chief. Amr defeated the Byzantine forces, and reoccupied Alexandria. But as soon as Egypt was cleared of the Byzantine troops, Uthman dismissed Amr again, and gave all powers in Egypt to his foster-brother.

Egypt was the first love of Amr bin Aas. His greatest ambition in life was to rule Egypt. Denied now, not only the fruits of his labors but also the recognition of his great services, he returned to Medina, a most embittered, resentful and frustrated man. Since in Medina he had nothing to do, he occupied himself with the castigation of, and intrigue against, the author of his frustrations – Uthman. When the latter was killed by the rebels, he openly boasted:

"I am Abu Abdullah. When I make up my mind to do something, there is nothing that can stop me."

Sir John Glubb

"Amr ibn al-Aas, twice conqueror of Egypt, who had been summarily dismissed by Osman in favor of his foster-brother, was busy spreading disaffection in Medina." (The Great Arab Conquests, p.299, 1963)

"Amr ibn al-Aas, the conqueror of Egypt, had been living in Medina since his dismissal by Osman, and had been among the most acid critics of the old khalifa." (The Great Arab Conquests, p.324, 1963)

Amr bin Aas had many a sharp encounter with Uthman in the Great Mosque and in the latter's palace. In one of them, he demanded from him a public apology (Tauba) for his questionable conduct in governmental affairs.

Sir John Glubb

"Amr ibn al-Aas, when consulted (by Osman), replied brutally, 'You have subjected the whole nation to Beni Umayya. You have gone astray and so have the people. Either make up your mind to be just or give up the job." (The Great Arab Conquests, p.300, 1967)

Amr bin Aas denounced and cursed Uthman publicly, and did not spare even his father. Curiously, it never occurred to Uthman to use the same powers of state against him that he had invoked against Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir and Abdullah ibn Masood. He had, not one, but numerous confrontations with Amr bin Aas, and yet, he never threatened to banish him to Rabza, and he never ordered his slaves to throw him out of the Mosque or his palace, and to break his ribs. Perhaps Uthman figured, like a man of prudence that he was, that the tongue-lashing that Amr bin Aas gave him, did not break any bones in his body after all and, therefore, it was not necessary to chastise him. Furthermore, they differed but they differed within the conventions of the exclusive "club" to which both of them belonged. But Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir and Abdullah ibn Masood, were "non-members." Therefore, the same rules did not apply to them which applied to a "member" like Amr bin Aas.

Causes of the Assassination of Uthman

Uthman was khalifa for twelve years. The power grid which he had inherited from Umar, worked relatively well for the first half of his reign. There was peace for him and for the Muslims. But in the second half, discontent began to build up against him, and it went on building up until it reached the flash point in A.D. 656 when an enraged and outraged mob killed him in his own palace in Medina.

The people had genuine causes for their discontent. They knew that unlimited quantities of gold and silver were coming into the treasury from the provinces but they did not see any of it. All of it disappeared

into the private coffers of the members of the ruling class. The ruling class was made up exclusively of the members of the clan of Banu Umayya – the clan to which Uthman himself belonged. The Umayyads, under Uthman, reached undreamed of affluence and the ultimate arrogance of power. The Muslims resented their arrogance, ostentation and hauteur, and the vulgar and inflammatory display by them of their riches and power.

Uthman dismissed all the governors and commanders who had been appointed by Abu Bakr and Umar, and in their stead, he appointed those men whose only "credentials" were that they were Umayyads. The people in the provinces groaned under the heels of these new governors and commanders. Drunk with power as they were, their excesses and highhandedness knew no bounds. They considered themselves above and beyond the reach of law. Private purposes of the Umayyads took precedence over public purposes, and their "rights" to depredate, dominated the rights of the Muslim umma. The umma knew them to be only impious opportunists and arrant parasites who had seized control of the physical apparatus of Islam – the government of Medina. The provinces, therefore, were riddled with disaffection and rebellion.

The original patrons of the Umayyads were Abu Bakr and Umar. It were both of them who had, as it were, uncorked the bottle, but now it appeared to the umma that there was no way to squeeze the genie back into it. Uthman also changed the balance of political equation by alienating such old party war-horses as Abdur Rahman bin Auf and Amr bin Aas. He antagonized Banu Ghiffar and its allies by banishing Abu Dharr to Rabza where the latter died. He antagonized the Banu Makhzoom and their allies by savagely beating up Ammar ibn Yasir, and he made the Banu Hudhail and the Banu Zuhra his enemies by having Abdullah ibn Masood beaten up by his slaves.

Uthman was safe as long as he banished or beat up such friends of the Apostle of God as Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir and Abdullah ibn Masood. They did not belong to powerful tribes and Uthman had nothing to fear from them. But then he dismissed Amr bin Aas, the governor of Egypt. By doing so, he wrote his own prescription for disaster. Amr bin Aas raked up a hornets' nest for him. Uthman appeared to be anxious to find new enemies. A new "recruit" into the ranks of his enemies was Ayesha, the widow of the Prophet. In the times of her father

and Umar, she had been treated like a queen. But Uthman didn't show the same solicitude for her that they did. He even reduced her pension, and thus roused her anger. She called him Na'athal (a Jew of Medina), and openly incited the people against him by saying: "This Na'athal has relapsed into paganism. Kill him. May God kill him."

R.V.C. Bodley

Othman had never been an outstanding figure when Mohammed was alive. Today he showed that he lacked the qualities of his predecessors. He was easily swayed and had no scruples in replacing military leaders and governors by his favorites, regardless of their competence. He also made the mistake of offending Aisha.

The slight in itself was small, but it was of a kind to arouse all of Aisha's most vindictive instincts: Othman reduced her pension to the level of that of the other widows!

Aisha had always deemed herself Mohammed's favorite. During her father's and Omar's reigns, she had been held in the same regard as when her husband was alive. But with her two protagonists dead, she knew that it might require all her wit to maintain her position. When, therefore, Othman made his indirect attack, Aisha resolved that he was no worthy successor to her husband. Once she had settled that, all that remained was to find the best way to get rid of the enemy. The excuse or the methods employed had no bearing on the situation. When Aisha wanted something done, it was carried out regardless of ethics. In this case Othman gave Aisha every assistance. (The Messenger – the Life of Mohammed, New York, 1946)

Medina, once the symbol of piety and austerity, had changed. The city of the Prophet had become, after his death, the symbol of all the evils that foreign conquests and unrestrained capitalism bring in their wake. It must not be assumed that the Muslims of Medina acquiesced in all these aberrations and deviations from pristine Islam. They did not. But they had no power to check the abuse of power in the government. They protested but their protests fell on deaf ears. The voices of Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari, Ammar ibn Yasir and Abdullah ibn Masood which rose in protest against the tide of materialism threatening to engulf Islam, were silenced by brute force. Finding themselves at a dead-end, the

companions who were in Medina, began in 654 a campaign of writing letters to the Muslims in the provinces, asking them to make representations to the khalifa against the crimes of Marwan and the provincial governors, and to request him to remove them.

The Muslims in the provinces, themselves victims of tyranny and terror, and at a loss to know what to do, decided, after exchanging some letters with the companions, to send delegations to Medina to present their grievances to the khalifa, and to request him to remedy the situation. Uthman knew about the letters which the companions had sent to the provinces. But instead of taking remedial action, he committed a faux pas. Tabari, the historian, says that Uthman wrote to Muawiya, his governor in Syria, as follows:

"The people of Medina have relapsed into apostasy; they have broken the pledge of loyalty to me. They are now contemplating treason. You, therefore, send to me immediately in Medina, the fierce warriors of Syria, mounted on swift animals." (History, Volume III)

But Muawiya had no intention of obliging Uthman. Tabari further says:
"When Muawiya received Othman's letter, he decided to watch the situation, and he preferred not to oppose the companions of the Prophet openly because he knew that they were all united in their opposition to Othman."

Muawiya was watching the situation how it would play into his hands. He was not the man who would be deterred by any moral compunctions to oppose the companions of the Prophet. He had the ability but he did not have the willingness to help Uthman.

Abul Fida, the historian, says that in 656 a delegation of 700 members came to Medina from Egypt, and similar delegations also came from Kufa and Basra. They came seeking redress of bureaucratic misrule and profligate mismanagement of public funds both in Medina and in the provinces.If Uthman had given them audience, had heard their grievances, and if he had only assured them that he was in sympathy with them, they would have been satisfied, and they would have returned to their homes. But unfortunately, he did not do so.

The Egyptian delegates who were encamped at the outskirts of Medina, sent a letter with an emissary to Uthman, asking him to give them audience. In the letter they had requested him to remove his foster-brother, Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, from his position as governor of Egypt, and to institute certain administrative reforms. But instead of considering the request, Uthman ordered his slaves to throw the Egyptian emissary out.

The Egyptians then entered the city, and they told the other people what Uthman had done. The delegations of Kufa and Basra were already in Medina, and they declared their support for the Egyptians. All three delegations then pitched camp within sight of the palace of the khalifa. On the following Friday, Uthman led the congregational prayers, and he read the sermon. He could not have been more gauche and tactless. Standing in the pulpit, and addressing the delegations from Egypt and Iraq, he said:

"The Apostle of God had predicted that mischief-mongers would, one day, come to his city to disturb its peace. He cursed them all, and now you can see what you are doing."

The congregation bridled at these remarks, and there was much commotion in the mosque. Someone threw a rock at Uthman which caught him in the face; he fell from the pulpit, and was carried out of the mosque to his palace.

After this incident, Uthman was in a state of siege in his palace. But he could go into the Mosque, and he still led the prayers. A few days later, however, the Egyptians and the Iraqis forbade him to enter the Mosque unless he listened to what they had to say, and they appointed a certain Ghafiqi, a member of the Egyptian delegation, to lead them in prayer.

In his distress, Uthman sought Ali's aid in dispersing the besiegers. Ali said to him:

"Their grievances are genuine, and their demands reasonable. They will not disperse merely because I ask them to disperse. They will disperse only if you can give them your pledge to accept their demands."

Uthman said:

"I give you the authority to negotiate with them. Whatever may be your terms of agreement with them, I will accept them."

Ali met the leaders of the Egyptian delegation and talked with them. They agreed to return to Egypt if Uthman recalled his foster-brother, the infamous Abdullah bin Saad, and if, in his stead, he appointed Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr as the new governor. Ali told Uthman what he would have to do if he wished the Egyptians to leave Medina.

Uthman agreed to appoint Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr as the new governor of Egypt. This satisfied the Egyptians. Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr left Medina to take charge of his new duties, and many of the Egyptians accompanied him. Uthman could once again enter the Mosque and lead the Muslims in prayer. The incident, apparently, was closed.

But unfortunately it was not. Uthman's alter ego, Marwan, exhumed it, zombie-like. When he heard that the Egyptians had left Medina with the governor of their own choice, he gave Uthman the following advice:

"Some of the Egyptians have left Medina but those who came from the other provinces, are still here. The example of the Egyptians will encourage them also to put forward impossible demands. To prevent this from happening, you must make a speech in the Mosque saying 'The Egyptians had only heard some rumors in their country. When they came to Medina, they discovered that whatever they had heard, was nothing but falsehood. They were satisfied and they went back to their homes. Now you too should leave Medina, and return to your homes.'"

Uthman did not want to tell such a brazen lie but Marwan had the power to make him do anything. After some hesitation, he agreed. He led a prayer, and after the sermon, said:

"O Muslims! The Egyptians had heard some false reports about their khalifa, and they came to Medina to verify them. Here they noticed that whatever they had heard, was all lies. They were, therefore, satisfied, and they went back to Egypt. Now you too should return to your homes." (Tabari, History, Volume III)

These words were scarcely out of Uthman's mouth when pandemonium broke loose in the Mosque. Everyone began to yell at him: "Uthman, repent! Uthman repent! You are lying. Fear God. You are lying in God's Own House, and in the pulpit of His Messenger."

Uthman was seized with panic, and not knowing what to do, he had to "repent." He begged God to forgive his sin, and then went home.

Ali was shocked beyond belief at Uthman's volte-face, and at his brazenness in making a false statement in the Mosque. Nevertheless, he called on the old man once again, and chided him for what he had done. Uthman begged him to intervene once again on his behalf with the Muslims.

Ali told him that he (Uthman) could, if he wished, still win the confidence and respect of the Muslims if he admitted his errors, and if he sincerely apologized for them. He also warned him that if he did not, then the strangers who were in the city, might besiege him in his palace, and if they did, then he (Ali) might not be able to conciliate them.

Uthman, in a chastened mood, assured Ali that he would indeed do as he had advised. Ali, in turn, assured the Iraqis, the Egyptians and the other Muslims that the khalifa would accept all their demands, and he reminded them that they too had some duties, such as showing respect to him, obeying him and supporting him.

On the following day, Uthman went into the Mosque, admitted his errors, sought pardon and mercy from God, resolved not to repeat the errors, and promised to take immediate action upon the demands of the Muslims for reforms in the government.

The audience was deeply moved by the old khalifa's regrets, and by his assurances, and many tears were shed on both sides as a mark of a "change of heart." It appeared that the tears had washed away the rancors, the resentment and the bitterness of all concerned.

Through Ali's efforts, a reconciliation, apparently, was achieved, and it was a miracle. But as it turned out, it was a very short-lived miracle.

Uthman left the Mosque with many pious resolutions. But when he entered his palace, he found Marwan, his chief policy planner, awaiting him to give him a new piece of advice. But before he could say anything, Uthman's wife, Naila, who was also present, stopped him, and the following exchange took place between them:

Naila: For heaven's sake, you now keep your mouth shut after all the harm you have already done. If you don't, you will, without a doubt, compass the destruction of this old man (Uthman).You are, by your perversity, pushing him to the edge of the pit of death.

Marwan: Who are you to meddle in these affairs? Have you forgotten that you are the daughter of a man who did not even know how to take ablutions for the prayer?

Naila: You are the most unmitigated liar. Before mentioning my father, you ought to remember that you and your father are the accursed ones of God and His Apostle. If I were not exercising restraint because of this old man (Uthman), I would have taught you a lesson.

Naila then turned to her husband, and said to him:

"Do not listen to this foul and wretched man. What is he? Who gives him a hoot? If you want your own safety, then act upon Ali's advice. Don't you see how much prestige and influence he has among the Muslims?"

This was the most sagacious advice that Uthman ever received from any member of his own family but he didn't accept it. Naila then left the presence of her husband. As soon as she was out of sight, Marwan said to Uthman:

"You have committed a major blunder in the Mosque by admitting your errors, and by 'repenting' in public. Admission of your sins has now brought the crowds from the Mosque to the gate of your house. They are here only because they have seen your weakness. If you had been 'firm,' with them, they would not have dared to come here. The only way to deal with them, and to impress them with your power and authority, is to be 'firm' with them."

A crowd of Muslims had, in fact, gathered outside the palace of the khalifa. But it was a peaceful crowd. Many Muslims from in and out of town had gathered hoping to hear some important announcement relating to changes in policy and administration. Uthman should have gone out to greet them. But he did not. Instead, he gave Marwan his permission to face them, and to "impress" them with his "firmness."

Marwan's idea of being firm with the Muslims was to use violent, abusive and threatening language. With the new "carte blanche" from

Uthman, he went out, and facing the crowd which was peaceful and friendly, said:

"Why have you gathered here? What are your intentions? Have you come to attack us or to rob us and to plunder us? If you have, then listen to this with attention. You will not succeed. You cannot wrest power and authority from our hands. We shall not be intimidated by you or by anyone else. Now begone from here. May God curse you."

This time Uthman and Marwan had gone beyond the point of no return!

The Muslims were petrified with shock and horror at the insolence of Uthman's son-in-law. But they did not linger to palter with him. Instead, they went to see Ali, and reported to him the substance of Marwan's "speech."

Ali was aghast to hear the story. Was there anything he could still do to arrest the declension of the situation? He pondered the question, and then called on Uthman and said to him:

"Is this the hospitality that you have offered to your brother Muslims? If you have lost all good sense before them, you ought, at least, to fear the wrath of God. In your anxiety to shield an apostate and a liar, you have lost that fear also, and now you can tell lies publicly and in the Mosque, and you can break solemn pledges without batting an eye. You have allowed Marwan to lead you wherever he wants to. Remember, he will lead you into the pit of iniquity if he hasn't already done so, and you will never be able to extricate yourself from it. Now I shall not try to mediate between you and the Muslims. I shall take no interest in your affairs. This is my last visit to you. You do what you like. But if you still need me, then first you will have to get rid of Marwan. I shall dissociate myself with you as long as Marwan stands between you and me."

Ali left Uthman's palace never to return. When Naila, the wife of Uthman, saw him leaving, she was deeply troubled. Events had proved that she had a better judgment than most of those around Uthman. Though her advice had not been accepted, she was still anxious to salvage whatever she could, and said to her husband:

"How many times I have told you to get rid of Marwan. He is a curse around your neck. You know that he is a man of bankrupt reputation, bankrupt morals and bankrupt sense. The situation is extremely

dangerous, and is rapidly getting worse. You have lost your own credence by betraying the trust of the Muslims. Now if there is any man who can still save you, that man is Ali. If he doesn't help you, then you are lost."

Flustered as Uthman was by the incident, he realized that what his wife had told him, was the absolute truth. He, therefore, sent a messenger requesting Ali to come. But Ali refused to go whereupon Uthman decided to go himself to see him. Not to be seen by anyone, he went at night.

Before Ali, the old khalifa poured out the story of his own helplessness, and apologized for his many errors, and gave him assurance that he would, in future, stand by his word, if he (Ali) would mediate between him (Uthman) and the Muslims. Ali, however, said:

"You stand in the pulpit of the Apostle of God, and make a false statement. You give the Muslims your pledge to walk in truth, and then you break it. Now everyone has seen how you honor your commitments. If Muslims want to see you and talk with you, Marwan abuses them and curses them. How do you expect me to trust you now with such a record as you have? I do not accept any responsibility for any of your acts. The alternatives are there, and the choice is yours. Get rid of Marwan. If you cannot do that, then do not expect anything from me. With Marwan at your side, and as your chief adviser, there is nothing I can do for you anyway."

Uthman loved his son-in-law too much to part with him. Ali's terms, therefore, were not acceptable to him, and he returned home. (Ali was not asking Uthman to banish Marwan from Medina as the Apostle of God had done; he was only asking him not to be misled by him.)

While Marwan was jousting with the Muslims in Medina, Uthman had been writing letters to all his governors asking them to send their troops to Medina so he could "discipline" the "rebels." His best hopes lay in Muawiya, and to him he wrote numerous letters, urging him to bring his warriors to Medina or to send them with his trusted officers. But neither Muawiya nor any other of his governors responded to his signals of distress.

One day a man saw Uthman outside his palace, and remarked: "How I wish I could drag you and those around you in dirt." Uthman said that those who were around him, were none other than the companions of the Apostle of God. He retorted that those "companions" must be Hakam, Marwan, Walid bin Aqaba, Saeed bin Aas, Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, and the rest of the brood. Uthman murmured: "Let the army come, and then I will teach you a lesson."

But the army never came. Muawiya temporized, and figured that if there was chaos in Medina, he would maneuver in it, and if possible, would run away with the khilafat itself.

When these events were taking place in Medina, bad news came from the north. Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr, the governor designate of Egypt, had reached Elath on the Red Sea arm called the Gulf of Aqaba, and was soon going to enter Egypt. He was camping in Elath when some members of his entourage noticed a lone camel-rider coming from Medina. They stopped him for interrogations, and finding his answers evasive, frisked him. A long search of his person and baggage yielded a letter hidden in a leaden tube at the bottom of his saddlebag. The letter was addressed to Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarh, the governor of Egypt, and it bore the seal of the khalifa himself. They brought the letter and the letter-carrier before Muhammad. The latter broke the seal, and was startled to read the following message:

"When Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr and members of his party arrive in Egypt, seize them, and kill them all, and you carry on your duties as governor of Egypt."

(As noted earlier, Abdullah ibn Saad ibn Abi Sarh was not in Egypt at this time; he was in Palestine.)

At first Muhammad could not believe his own eyes. How could Uthman order his governor to kill him and his companions? He read and reread the letter until its meaning began to sink in his mind.

Muhammad decided to return to Medina. In Medina, he went into the Mosque of the Prophet, and placed the letter before the companions for their perusal. Some of them and members of Muhammad's party, called

on Uthman, to show him the letter, and the following exchange took place between them:

The companions: Did you write this letter?

Uthman: No.

The companions: Whose seal is on this letter?

Uthman: Mine.

The companions: Whose writing is this?

Uthman: My secretary's.

The companions: Whose slave is this letter-carrier?

Uthman: Mine.

The companions: Who sent him to Egypt?

Uthman: I do not know.

The companions: The seal on the letter is yours; the writing is your secretary's; the slave Egypt. If you are so unaware, then it would be both in your interest who carried it, is yours; and still you do not know who sent him to and in the interest of the Muslim umma that you abdicate from khilafat. Let some other man, conscientious and fit for the job, take charge of the government of the Muslims.

Uthman: Khilafat is a robe that God has given me, and I cannot take it off under any circumstance. What I can do, however, is to 'repent.'

The companions: Your repentance cannot hoodwink us any more. Already you have repented many times. You, therefore, quit and make room for someone worthier than you for the high office of khalifa. You say that you do not know who sent this letter. If you are telling the truth, then it cannot be anyone other than your son-in-law who is your secretary. He wrote it and he sent it. He is the real criminal who was going to take the lives of many innocent Muslims. Now if you are sincere, then surrender him to us so that we may investigate him, and uphold justice.

Uthman: I cannot surrender Marwan to you.

The companions: We then understand that you are an accomplice in the crime, and you too wanted innocent Muslims to be killed upon their arrival in Egypt merely because you and Marwan do not like them.

The companions then went to the Mosque to report to the Iraqis and the Egyptians the outcome of their parleys with the khalifa. The Egyptians, thereupon, laid siege to Uthman's palace. The delegates who came

from Kufa and Basra also pitched their tents around the palace of the khalifa, and declared that he would be their prisoner until he gave up Marwan to them for trial and judgment.

During the siege, drinking water ran out in the palace. Uthman appealed to some of the companions to send water but they ignored his appeals. Finally, he sent word to Ali, and the latter sent water with armed guards. The guards had to fight their way into the palace to deliver the life-giving and life-saving fluid.

Uthman still hoped that one of his governors, probably Muawiya, would send his troops who would annihilate the unruly and presumptuous rebels. The rebels, in the meantime, were tightening their noose around his neck.

Uthman's Assassination

Many minor incidents occurred during the siege of the palace of Uthman. There were occasions when he saw with his own eyes some of the principal companions of the Prophet among the besiegers urging them to keep their pressure on the besieged.

One day it occurred to a certain Ibn Ayyadh, one of the companions of the Prophet, to mediate between the besiegers and the besieged in an attempt to restore peace to Medina. He came to the palace gate and called Uthman by his name. Uthman peeked out of the window above, and acknowledged the call. Ibn Ayyadh begged him to abdicate and thereby to put an end to the state of anarchy in the city, and also to save the Muslims from possible bloodshed. He had not concluded his appeal yet when one of Uthman's pickets killed him with an arrow.

A cry of anguish went up from the besiegers. They asked Uthman to give up the killer to them but he said:

"How can I give up my own supporters and protectors to you so you kill them? Never."

Uthman's answer had the effect of a spark on dry powder. The crowd surged forward to enter the palace and to capture the murderer of Ibn Ayyadh. Marwan, Saeed bin Aas, Mughira bin Khins, and the mercenaries of Uthman tried to defend the palace from within, and to repel the besiegers. The latter attacked the other gates also but found defenders at every one of them.

While this struggle was going on at the gates of the palace of Uthman, an Ansari, a certain Amr bin Hazm, called the besiegers to his house which was adjacent to the house of Uthman. They entered his house, went on top, and from there descended into Uthman's house with drawn swords. There was a skirmish with the mercenaries some of whom were killed but all members of the Banu Umayya – Marwan, Saeed bin Aas and Mughira bin Khins among them – succeeded in escaping through a secret door. Marwan is said to have been wounded but recovered later. In the melee someone killed Uthman. His wife, Naila, is said to have lifted her hand to defend him from a sword, and her fingers were sliced off in the attempt.

Uthman was killed in his palace, abandoned by the Umayyads. Twelve years after his election or selection as khalifa, his caliphate lay in shambles; its personnel decimated; its promises discredited, its convictions and capabilities overturned.

Uthman was 84 years old at his death. He had demolished the house built so laboriously by Abu Bakr, Umar and Abdur Rahman bin Auf. He had failed to assert convincingly the qualities of leadership, competence and inspiration essential to a khalifa. He had staggered down into senility and had lost his way.

Uthman remained a prisoner in his palace for 49 days. He implored Muawiya to come to Medina and to save his life. But Muawiya had one "answer" to his appeals – silence! Judging by his studied silence, it appears that Muawiya could not have cared less for Uthman. It is astonishing that many supporters of Uthman criticize Ali for not "saving" the life of Uthman even though he (Ali) did not have any means for doing so; but they condone Muawiya's indifference to him (Uthman) even though he had all the means to save him (Uthman). A tiny contingent of his army, if he had sent it to Medina, could have routed or slaughtered all the rebels but he did not!

Amr bin Aas was one of the companions of the Prophet. Uthman dismissed him twice as governor of Egypt. He never forgave Uthman for his dismissal; he was blistering toward him. It is entirely possible that it was he who engineered Uthman's murder, and he didn't even make a

secret of his intentions. But he was full of guile and cunning, and managed to escape the indictment of history.

Two other agents – provocateurs in the murder of Uthman were Talha and Zubayr. They fanned the flames of public wrath and hatred against Uthman same as Amr bin Aas did. Both of them believed, same as Amr bin Aas and Muawiya did, that they had nothing to lose in a breakdown of law and order, and had probably everything to gain. All of them were accessories to the crimes against Uthman either by direct complicity or by their acquiescence and indifference.

When Uthman was killed, Medina was full of women and men of great distinction. Among them were the widows of the Prophet except Ayesha who was in Makkah; Saad bin Abi Waqqas, Abdullah bin Umar bin al-Khattab; the Muhajireen and the Ansar; the veterans of the battles of Badr and Uhud; and many of those companions who had taken the pledge of the Tree at Hudaybiyya. But except Ali, no one among them all, showed the least anxiety to save the life of the khalifa.

Ali left nothing undone to save Uthman but neither he nor anyone else could have saved a man who was resolved to ruin himself. Marwan frustrated all his (Ali's) efforts to reverse the skid of the caliphate, and foiled all his attempts to reconcile the khalifa and the Muslims. He (Marwan) stood like an insurmountable barrier between them. Uthman paid heed neither to the entreaties of his own wife, Naila, nor to the warnings of Ali, but persisted in courting disaster. To him, Marwan's twaddle was nothing less than inspiration itself, and to him alone, he (Uthman) gave his first loyalty.

Among his supporters, Uthman could count only two men – Marwan and Saeed bin Aas - both of them the accursed ones of the Apostle of God. Sunni jurists and theologians attach great importance to the principle of consensus. Here there was consensus of the Companions of the Prophet in withholding their support from Uthman, and in opposing him. They withheld their support from him, and they opposed him almost en bloc. They abandoned him, to be slaughtered, in the words of Umar, by "the wolves of the Arabs." Who was right and who was wrong? It's a question for the Sunni jurists and theologians to answer.

The Aftermath of the Assassination of Uthman

When Ali ascended the throne of khilafat, he found the people in Medina divided into two groups. One of these groups was clamoring for vengeance for Uthman's blood. The other group maintained that Uthman had only paid the penalty for his impolitic deeds, and the question of seeking vengeance for his blood, therefore, did not arise. No matter what Ali did, it was inevitable that one of these two groups would rebel against his authority.

The new government was extremely shaky and Ali was struggling to consolidate it when the first of these two groups began to press him to penalize the murderers of Uthman. He said to them:

"I am not unaware of the need of penalizing the murderers of Uthman. But do we have the power to do so? At the moment, it is they who have the power. They can dictate to us; we cannot dictate to them. If they wish, they can do harm to us, and we cannot do any harm to them. Can you suggest any way we can overcome them or circumvent them?"

Medina, at this time, was, in fact, in the grip of the group which was opposed to Uthman – the rebels. It was their writ which ran in Medina, and no one dared to challenge them. If Ali decided to impose penalties on them, it was most probable that they would resist him by force of arms. They were conscious of their own strength, and of the weakness of the Medina government. If the first group, i.e., the vengeance-seekers, had detected any weakness in the rebels, then it would have challenged them during the siege of Uthman's palace. But it did not. During the siege, its leaders went underground. But as soon as Ali was elected caliph, they came out, and began to demand action from him in apprehending the rebels who had killed Uthman.

The leaders of the first group decided to challenge Ali. It was the opinion of Ayesha, who was one of them, and who was already in Makkah, that they should attack Medina because the murderer or murderers of Uthman were all there. But Talha and Zubayr, the other two leaders, who had told Ali that they were going to Makkah to perform Umra (the lesser pilgrimage), disagreed with her, and said:

"O mother of the believers! Forget Medina. Our army cannot fight against the rebels who are there. We have, therefore, to go to Basra." (Tabari, History, Vol. III)

Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr, the leaders of the first group, had an army; they had the weapons and they had the money, and yet they shied away from attacking Medina because they lacked the strength to overcome the rebels. If they could not fight against the rebels even though they had an army, how could Ali who did not have an army, fight against them?

If Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr sincerely wanted vengeance, they ought to have attacked Medina instead of going hundreds of miles across the desert to Basra. But they could see that the rebels were simply too many to be penalized. The people of Medina, of Egypt, of Kufa and of Basra, were all embroiled in the murder of Uthman, directly or indirectly. There were those companions who wrote letters to the rebel leaders, and invited them to Medina, and there were those Muhajireen and Ansar who gave their moral support to them (to the rebels). Without their tacit support, the rebels might never have dared to kill the incumbent khalifa in his own house.

There were two ways of penalizing the murderer(s) of Uthman. One was to kill every man who had taken part, directly or indirectly, in his murder regardless of who he was – a Muhajir, an Ansar, an Egyptian or an Iraqi. This was clearly impossible. But if it were possible, the State still could not kill thousands of men in retaliation for the murder of one man.

The other way was to investigate the murder, apprehend the real culprit or culprits, bring them to trial, and in the event of the crime being proved, to execute him or them. Ali was more than willing to adopt this course but first he had to restore law and order in the country after the anarchy and chaos that had lasted many months.

Uthman's murder was not the result of any sudden provocation that he gave. Long and protracted negotiations had preceded the crime itself. He was murdered after the failure of all those negotiations. Delegations came to see him from distant cities, and told him about the excesses of his governors. He promised to remedy the situation but he failed to keep his promise.

When a delegation reminded him of his own pledge to dismiss one of his governors, he said:

"You are suggesting that I should dismiss those of my governors whom you do not happen to like, and that I should appoint men of your

choice to run the government. If I were to act upon your wishes, I would become a nonentity, and you would be exercising all governmental authority and not I." (Tarikh Kamil - Ibn Atheer, Vol. III, p. 86)

The delegates were incensed by Uthman's answer, and they said:

"You lack the ability to set right the wrongs of your government. You must, therefore, abdicate from khilafat. If you do not, we shall be compelled to take some drastic step."

Uthman said:

"Are you threatening to kill me? If so, then what is the crime for the commission of which you would kill me? In Islam, execution is the penalty for:

(a) murder of some innocent person;

(b) apostasy;

(c) rape of a chaste woman.

I have not committed any of these crimes. On what other ground you want to kill me?"

The delegates' reply was as follows:

"For those men who spread mischief on earth, or usurp the rights of others, the penalty prescribed in the Book of God is execution. You have wantonly abused the powers of government. You banished from Medina a most honorable companion of the Apostle of God, and your lackeys have beaten up other friends of his. You have foisted drunkards and apostates upon the umma as its rulers. You and your governors have terrorized and tyrannized the Muslims, and have usurped their rights. You have done all this and more. Even so, if you abdicate voluntarily, we shall not meddle with you, and will leave you in peace."

But Uthman did not want to abdicate because, he said, that the khilafat was a "robe" which God had given him, and he could not take it off.

God can, of course, give the robe of khilafat to any one He wishes. But the robe of khilafat which Uthman was wearing, was given to him, not by God, but by Abdur Rahman bin Auf!

This dialogue makes it plain that the people took the last, desperate step only when everything else failed. They were convinced that Uthman's execution was right. Their conviction was further strengthened by the words and the deeds of such dignitaries as Ayesha, Talha, Zubayr

and Amr bin Aas each of whom had prescribed death for him, directly or indirectly.

Uthman and "Abdullah bin Saba"

The khilafat of Uthman had saddled the Muslims with a crippled government, and the host of economic, political and social dislocations that sprang from it, were met by an uncertain and often contradictory response. The dislocations eventually caused the death of the khalifa himself.

Many Sunni historians find it very difficult to admit that Uthman brought destruction upon himself. They are desperately anxious to "explain" or to rationalize why things went awry in his khilafat. But how? Their anxiety led them to create a mysterious and a sinister character whom they called "Abdullah bin Saba."

The creation of Abdullah bin Saba "solved" many of the problems of the Sunni historians. He made transference of guilt possible for them. According to his creators, he was a Jew from Yemen who had accepted Islam, migrated to Medina, and then went around preaching false and heretical doctrines, and spreading disaffection and hatred against Uthman. He was, they claim, responsible for all the sorrows and misfortunes, and eventually, for the death itself, of Uthman!

Abdullah bin Saba, it appears, suddenly became the most powerful figure in the entire Dar-ul-Islam. After all, it was he who toppled a khalifa from his throne, and threw the whole government of the Muslims into disarray.

What Abdullah bin Saba was doing, was high treason. Was anything easier for Marwan to do than to capture him and kill him for his treason, if he was in Medina? Or, was anything easier for a provincial governor or even for a petty official than to seize him, and to snuff out his life, if he was in one of the provinces? No. But for some mysterious reason, he swaggered from town to town and from province to province, flaying the khalifa, and no one ever touched him. He apparently lived a charmed existence!

It is amazing that Uthman could banish such a high-ranking companion of Muhammad Mustafa as Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari to Rabza (Abu

Dharr died in Rabza); he could beat up Ammar ibn Yasir into unconsciousness, and he could break the ribs of Abdullah ibn Masood, both most distinguished companions of Muhammad; yet he could give free rein to Amr bin Aas and "Abdullah bin Saba" to rouse the Muslims against himself with their stinging diatribes.

When Uthman was killed, "Abdullah bin Saba" probably figured that he had accomplished his mission, and he went "underground." But only a few months later, he "resurfaced" on the eve of the battle of Basra (the battle of the Camel). It was, his creators claim, he who was responsible for that deplorable battle. However, during or immediately after the battle, he disappeared again, and this time he disappeared forever. It is truly remarkable that he could vanish without leaving a trail or a trace behind him. His act of vanishing was so perfect as if he had never "existed."

Actually, the "necessity" which had led to the invention of Abdullah bin Saba, had ceased to exist. His creators, therefore, junked him. But even today, he is exhumed from time to time when Sunni historians want to "explain" the unpalatable facts of that epoch.

Dr. Taha Husain, the modern Egyptian historian, has exploded the Abdullah bin Saba myth in his book, al-Fitna-tul-Kubra. He has pointed out that Tabari is the first historian who wrote about Abdullah bin Saba. He heard about him from one Umar bin Saif. Abdullah bin Saba was born in the head of Umar bin Saif. But in the sources before Tabari, Abdullah bin Saba has not been mentioned anywhere. This is strange because such an important "personage" as Abdullah bin Saba who disrupted the Muslim society in the times of Uthman, should have received no notice from pre-Tabari historians.

Dr. Taha Husain further raises the question that even if it is assumed that Abdullah bin Saba was preaching false and heretical doctrines, was it he who "tempted" Uthman to appoint a character like Marwan as his prime minister? The Muhajireen and the Ansar resented Marwan's elevation since in their sight he was little more than a leper. And was Uthman acting upon the advice and guidance of Abdullah bin Saba when he dismissed the governors of the provinces who had been appointed by Umar bin al-Khattab, and appointed his own relatives in their stead? This was one of the major causes of disaffection in the provinces.

The story of Abdullah bin Saba is a typical attempt at an in-house whitewash. But the whitewash has not been white enough!

If on the one hand, the apologists of Uthman have created such a mythical character as Abdullah bin Saba to mask his (Uthman's) misjudgment and misgovernment, on the other they have chosen to deny the truth of the facts of history. In many of the writings on early Islamic history, appearing in recent years, Uthman's apologists have gone to the extent of denying that he dismissed any of the governors appointed by Abu Bakr or Umar, or, that there was anything reprehensible in it if he did so, or, that he committed any other error.

It is entirely the business and the prerogative of the protagonists of Uthman if they wish to live with falsehood and deception or rather with self-deception. But bitter and unpleasant truths will not just vanish merely because someone does not like them. This is what the modern Egyptian historian, Dr. Taha Husain, writes on this subject in his book, al-Fitna-tul-Kubra (The Great Upheaval):

"We should not follow those people who deny the veracity of the reports which have come down to us about the disputes and the disagreements of the companions of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, and the disturbances which took place at the same time. If we do that, we shall, in effect, be denying the entire basis of the history of Islam, from the time the Prophet proclaimed his mission. Those men who reported the disagreements of the companions, and who reported the political upheavals of their time, are the same who reported the early struggles, the campaigns, the conquests, and the life (Sira) of the Prophet and the khulafa (Abu Bakr and Umar). In this matter, we are not free to pick and choose. We cannot take only what we like and reject what we dislike. We cannot call some reports true and others false.

"One thing about which there can be no doubt is that Muslims were divided in the matter of Uthman, and their divisions ended in his death, and they have never been reunited since.

"But those divisions and disagreements had their causes. It is true that Muslims killed Uthman but they did not do so without any causes or

reasons." (al- Fitna-tul-Kubra {The Great Upheaval}, published in Cairo in 1959)

Chapter 59

Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Fourth Caliph of the Muslims

ALI BELONGED TO THE CLAN OF BANU HASHIM, the most distinguished clan in all Arabia; and in Banu Hashim, he belonged to the most distinguished family – the family of Abdul Muttalib. Abdul Muttalib had ten sons. Two of them were Abdullah, the father of Muhammad Mustafa, and Abu Talib, the father of Ali. Abdullah and Abu Talib were the children of the same mother whereas their other brothers were born of the other wives of their father.

Ali's mother, Fatima, also belonged to the clan of Hashim. She was the daughter of Asad the son of Hashim. Asad and Abdul Muttalib were brothers. She was thus the first cousin of Abdullah and Abu Talib.

Ali's mother, Fatima bint Asad, was the second woman in all Arabia to accept Islam, the first being Khadija.

Fatima bint Asad was the foster-mother of Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God. She brought him up as her own son, and in fact, loved him more than her own children, and he called her his mother.

Ali's father, Abu Talib, was the Defender of Islam, and he was the Protector and Guardian of Muhammad. He supported Islam and Muhammad consistently, and he was undaunted in the face of opposition and threats from the pagans.

Both in Makkah and Medina, Muhammad Mustafa declared that Ali was his brother in this world and in the Hereafter.

Ali was the victor of the battle of Badr. He alone killed half the number of all the Makkans who were killed in that battle.

Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of God, gave his only daughter, Fatima Zahra, in marriage to Ali. God blessed this marriage with children. Those children were God's most devout servants. Their greatest pleasure in life was to wait upon their Lord.

In the battle of Uhud, most of the Muslims fled from the battlefield. One who did not flee, was Ali. He saved the life of his master, Muhammad, that day.

At the siege of Medina, Ali killed Amr bin Abd Wudd, and thereby saved Medina from being overrun, and its people from being massacred.

Ali captured Khyber. With Khyber's conquest, Islam became a state with territory. Until the conquest of Khyber, Islam was only a city-state, confined to the walls of Medina.

Ali was the secretary who indicted the Treaty of Hudaybiyya.

When Makkah capitulated to the Prophet, Ali rode his shoulders, and smashed the idols in the Kaaba. He and his master, Muhammad, purified the House of God for all time by removing all vestiges of idolatry and polytheism from it. In this manner, Ali collaborated with Muhammad, the Messenger of God, from beginning to end, in constructing the framework of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

In the battle of Hunayn, the Muslims fled once again. Ali put himself between the Apostle and the pagan warriors who wanted to kill him. He fought against them until the Muslims rallied.

In October 630 (9 A.H.) the Apostle led an expedition to Tabuk, and he appointed Ali his viceroy in Medina.

Among all the companions of the Prophet, Ali was the most knowledgeable. He had thorough knowledge of the Qur'an, and its interpretation. He was the best of all judges, and he was the most eloquent orator of the Arabs.

Just before his death, the Prophet equipped and organized an expedition to Syria, and he appointed Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha, its general. With the exception of Ali, he ordered all the Muhajireen to serve under Usama. Ali was to stay with him in Medina.

In the defence of Islam, it was Ali's family which offered the greatest sacrifices. Obaidullah ibn al-Harith who was killed in the battle of Badr, and was the first martyr of Islam in the battlefield, was his first cousin. Mas'ab ibn Umayr and Hamza were killed in the battle of Uhud, and both of them were his uncles. Jafar Tayyar who was killed in the battle of Mootah was his elder brother.

When Muhammad Mustafa died, Ali performed his obsequies, and gave him burial. He knew what the other companions were doing when he was busy with these duties but he did not allow anything to distract him. He kept his duty ahead of his interests, and his principles ahead of politics.

Edward Gibbon

"The birth, the alliance, the character of Ali, which exalted him above the rest of his countrymen, might justify his claim to the vacant throne of Arabia. The son of Abu Talib was, in his own right, the chief of the family of Hashem, and the hereditary prince or guardian of the city and temple of Mecca. The light of prophecy was extinct; but the husband of Fatima might expect the inheritance and blessings of her father; the Arabs had sometimes been patient of a female reign; and the two grandsons of the Prophet had often been fondled in his lap, and shown in his pulpit, as the hope of his age, and the Chiefs of the Youth of Paradise. The first of the true believers might aspire to march before them in this world and in the next; and if some were of a graver and more rigid cast, the zeal and virtue of Ali were never outstripped by any recent proselyte. He united the qualifications of a poet, a soldier, and a saint: his wisdom still breathes in a collection of moral and religious sayings; and every antagonist, in the combats of the tongue or of the sword, was subdued by his eloquence and valor. From the first hour of his mission to the last rites of his funeral, the Apostle was never forsaken by a generous friend, whom he delighted to name his brother, his vicegerent, and the faithful Aaron of a second Moses. The son of Abu Talib was afterwards reproached for neglecting to secure his interests by a solemn declaration of his right, which would have silenced all competition, and sealed his succession by the decrees of Heaven. But the unsuspecting hero confided in himself: the jealousy of empire, and perhaps the fear of opposition, might suspend the resolutions of Mohammed; and the bed of sickness was besieged by the artful Ayesha, the daughter of Abu Bakr and the enemy of Ali.

The hereditary claims and lofty spirit of Ali were offensive to an aristocracy of elders, desirous of bestowing and resuming the scepter by a free and frequent election; the Koreish could never be reconciled to the proud pre-eminence of the line of Hashem." (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

The foregoing characterization is correct in general but some statements in it need qualification.

Gibbon has erred in stating that Ali did not secure his interests by a solemn declaration of his right by the Prophet. The Prophet had made such a declaration, not once but many times, as noted before.

The historian has also spoken of the Prophet's "fear of opposition." The Prophet had no fear of anyone. He had overcome much more formidable enemies than those whose opposition could "frighten" him in his hour of triumph.

Gibbon further speaks of "a free and frequent election." The aristocracy of elders was desirous of bestowing and resuming the scepter but only to itself, and not by a free and frequent election. Abu Bakr's accession to the throne was an "improvisation," and Umar was the "king-maker" in his case. When Abu Bakr was dying, he appointed Umar as his successor by a fiat. In doing so, he dispensed with the farce of election. Umar, before his death, formed a panel of six electors, and restricted the choice of khalifa to it. No one outside this panel could be chosen as khalifa.

The only election which was really free was that of Ali ibn Abi Talib. He was elected in the first and the last free election ever in the entire history of Islam.

Lastly, Gibbon says that Koreish could never be reconciled to the proud pre-eminence of the line of Hashem. He is right. But the same Koreish who could not be reconciled to the proud pre-eminence of the line of Hashem, were very eager to be reconciled to the proud pre-eminence of the line of the erstwhile idol-worshippers and the usurers of Makkah. In their eagerness to be reconciled to the latter, the Koreish who had resumed the scepter earlier, now bestowed it upon them.

The Restoration of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth – (The Caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib)

After the murder of Uthman, fear and panic seized the companions of the Prophet. The members of Umar's electoral committee retreated into the safety of anonymity. The fate of Uthman had struck terror into their hearts. The whole country was seething with agitation, and no one, no matter how daring and ambitious, was willing to put his neck into the loop by accepting the responsibility of running the government. It was a responsibility fraught with the gravest perils.

But something had to be done. The vessel of Islam could not be left adrift for long, and a firm hand had to be found to keep it on an even keel.

Twelve years of misgovernment had shaken the Muslims out of their long slumber and smudginess. Now they realized that the leadership of the community ought to be in the hands of a man who would put public interest ahead of the interests of his own family. Therefore, as soon as Uthman died, all eyes turned to Ali. The companions of the Prophet could not think of anyone else who had the ability and the grit to put an end to graft in the government and to anarchy in the land, and to restore peace, and law and order to the Dar-ul-Islam which was battered by

economic and social conflict, and was buffeted by a rapid succession of traumas.

All the leading Muhajireen and Ansar, therefore, gathered in the Mosque of the Prophet, and agreed, at a caucus, to ask Ali to take charge of the government, and to steer the ship of state to safety. A delegation then called on Ali, and requested him to accept this responsibility.

Tabari says in his History that the Muhajireen and the Ansar almost mobbed Ali. They told him that the umma was without a leader, and the government was without a head, and that he, i.e., Ali, alone was the most qualified person to fill the position, not only because of his propinquity with Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, but also because of his personal qualities and his services to Islam.

It was the first time since the death of the Apostle of God that it occurred to anyone in Medina that there was such a thing as a "qualification" to be a caliph. In the past the question of qualification had been shelved each time a new ruler had to be found. Umar made Abu Bakr khalifa because the latter was the oldest of the companions. Abu Bakr reciprocated Umar's gesture by choosing him as his successor. Uthman was chosen khalifa because he was rich and weak.

Ali, however, did not accept the offer of the companions, and said that he preferred to be an adviser rather than the caliph.

But the companions also did not accept Ali's refusal, and said:

"No man has given more distinguished service to Islam, nor is anyone closer to Muhammad than you. We consider you to be the worthiest of all men to be our Khalifa." (Tarikh Kamil, Vol. III, p. 98, Ibn Atheer)

Ali still did not agree, and the companions still persisted, and said:

"We appeal to you in the name of God to accept the caliphate. Don't you see the state of the umma? Don't you see new perils rising everywhere in the lands of Islam? Who will check them if not you?" (Tarikh Kamil, Vol. III, p. 99, Ibn Atheer)

But Ali was unmistakably cool to the idea of accepting the caliphate. It was not a conventional coolness but was the result of long and sober reflection.

In the past, on one occasion, "ambition" had cost Ali the throne of Arabia. Umar had remarked that he would have appointed Ali as ruler of the Muslims if he (Ali) had not been too "ambitious." Umar spoke as if to be ambitious was something reprehensible. His remark also presupposed that he himself and some others had become khalifas without any ambition. Perhaps the khilafat was something that had been forced upon

them much against their will; and they had no choice but to accept the burden of its responsibility!

Since Umar and Abu Bakr had no ambition, both of them, and Abu Obaida ibn al-Jarrah, all three, must have been either driven or dragged into the outhouse of Saqifa!

The reception by Ali of the request of the companions to accept the khilafat, would suggest that he had, at last, said farewell to ambition. In the past, he had never missed an opportunity to draw public attention to the primacy of his own rights, and to the justice of his case. He believed that it was his inherent right to become the first successor of the Apostle of God. This right was not something that other people could "give" him, even though they could take it away from him, and they did.

The keystone in the policy of the government of Saqifa, as noted before, was to debar Ali and the Banu Hashim from the caliphate. In this its first two incumbents were successful. The third incumbent, however, was killed in the midst of a breakdown of law and order, and he did not have the time to appoint his own successor. But if he had lived, he would have, without a doubt, appointed his son-in-law, Marwan, or his cousin, Muawiya, his successor.

Ali was bypassed on three successive occasions in the past. But now, after the death of Uthman, the Muslims felt that they were, for the first time, really free to elect or select a caliph for themselves, and their choice for the position was Ali. A coincidence of events had, at last, brought the long-sought caliphate within his reach.

But to everyone's surprise, Ali was not showing any eagerness to grasp it. Why?

Actually, Ali's desire to become caliph was not prompted by ambition as Umar had claimed even though there is nothing wrong in being ambitious. Ali wanted to become caliph because he knew that he and he alone had the ability to steer the vessel of Islam on the same course which the Apostle of God had charted for it. Other people, he knew, lacked this ability.

The institution of khilafat which was the legacy of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, and which, therefore, ought to have been the symbol of the moral and spiritual authority of Islam to the rest of the world, had become, instead, in the course of the quarter-century since his death, the symbol of undiluted materialism and naked imperialism. Profound changes had taken place in the lifestyle of the Muslims. Instead of imitating the pure and austere life of Muhammad, most of them imitated alien lifestyles. What propelled them now, was not the ideals of Islam but the

lust to become rich and powerful at any cost. The pristine simplicity and the egalitarianism of the times of the Prophet of Islam, had become demoted. The quality of the life of the umma had visibly declined.

Ali knew all this better than anyone else. He had kept his finger on the pulse of the Muslim umma, and he had monitored its progress or its lack of progress in all directions.

Ali also knew that the caliphate was no longer something that one could take with "its roses and its thorns." The roses were all gone; and all that was left, were the thorns. Accepting the caliphate now would only mean wearing a crown of those thorns.

In 656 the caliphate was little more than a legacy of turbulence and deficits.

Ali figured that if he accepted the caliphate, there would be two courses open before him, and he would have to adopt one of them. One course would be to follow the drift of events; to acquiesce in the general moral decline; to connive at the corruption and rapacity of the provincial governors; to give the bureaucracy a free hand in exploiting and oppressing the umma; and to tolerate the anti-Islamic and neo-pagan practices of the new aristocracy. But such a course is repugnant to Islam, and therefore, was even more repugnant to him.

The second course for Ali, was to accept the challenge of the whole world that would inevitably array itself against him, and to fight against it regardless of consequences as long as it disobeyed the commandments of God. If he did, he would only be imitating his late friend and master, Muhammad. The latter had also challenged the whole world and had fought against it regardless of consequences when he had first proclaimed his mission. Ali knew that if he accepted the caliphate, the new Arab aristocracy would challenge him, and his reign would begin with a civil war. A civil war is not an auspicious beginning but what was the alternative for him?

The choice before Ali was not between winning the civil war if there was one, or not fighting at all; it was instead, between what is right and what is wrong; between truthfulness and deception; between adherence to principle and pursuit of realpolitik. He wanted to rebuild the infrastructure of the Islamic society or rather to restore the infrastructure just as it was in the times of the Apostle of God but he realized that he could do this only in the teeth of most determined opposition from the Quraysh.

Ali considered all this, and then wishing not to inaugurate his caliphate with a civil war, turned down the request of the companions to become the khalifa of the Muslims.

The author of the book Kitab-ul-Imama was-Siyassa gives the following account of these events:

When the delegation of the Muhajireen and the Ansar called on Ali and requested him to accept the khilafat, he refused. The delegation returned to the Mosque and reported its failure to the companions who were present there. But the latter said, "When the news of the murder of Uthman reaches the other parts of the empire, no one will pause to ask if a new khalifa has been elected or not, and the anarchy which now is confined to Medina, will spread to all the provinces. There is only one way to check lawlessness from spreading, and that is to compel Ali to become caliph. Therefore, go back to him, and insist upon his taking charge of the government, and do not return until he agrees to do so. In this way, the news of the death of Uthman and the accession of Ali to the throne, will travel together to every part of the Dar-ul-Islam, and the situation will remain under control."

The delegation returned to see Ali, and this time, its members went beyond customary entreaties. They said that the Muslim umma was in an impasse, and if he didn't extricate it, he would be answerable to God and His Messenger for it. Would he abandon the umma of Muhammad in the impasse, they asked. This new wrinkle seemed to work. But being aware of the massive opposition to himself of the Quraysh, Ali was still lukewarm in accepting the proposal. He, therefore, hedged his acceptance with conditions of his own, and said to the delegates:

"I have perfect knowledge and understanding of the Book of God, and of the practices and precedents of His Messenger. In ruling the Muslim umma, I shall put their commandments and prohibitions before everything else. I shall not show any flexibility in this matter. I shall take charge of the government only if this condition is acceptable to you. If it is, and the Muslims are willing to take the oath of allegiance to me, then tell them to assemble in the Mosque of the Prophet." The delegation was ready to accept any conditions, and readily agreed to abide by Ali's terms.

(Kitab-ul-Imama was-Siyassa)

After the death of Umar, his confidante, Abdur Rahman bin Auf, had offered khilafat to Ali on condition that he would give a pledge to follow

the policy and the regulations of Abu Bakr and Umar. Ali refused to give any pledge, and kicked at the offer made by Abdur Rahman bin Auf. Now the same khilafat was being offered to him once again but without any conditions. In fact, it was he (Ali) who was placing conditions upon acceptance by him of the offer being made by the Muslim umma.

Ali told the companions that he would not defer to their judgment; instead, they would have to defer to his judgment if they insisted on his taking charge of the government. And he added that they – the Muslims – would have to give him unquestioning obedience – in peace and in war. They agreed. Their agreement was the victory of principle. The Muslim umma had, at length, surrendered to Ali's principles!

The umma of Muhammad, the blessed Messenger of God, in quest of security and salvation, had "drafted" Ali ibn Abi Talib to reverse the drift toward anarchy and chaos in Dar-ul-Islam. Tabari, the historian, says that Ali was "drafted" on Thursday. The citizens of Medina were very happy with their success in "drafting" him, and they said that they would offer their Friday prayer with their new caliph.

"Why not the best?" was the question in the mind of the Muslim umma when it "drafted" Ali as the caliph of Islam. When it was at last free to choose, it chose, instinctively and inevitably, the very best. Also, when the Muslim umma was insisting that Ali should occupy the highest position in Islam, it was unconsciously spurning all "the gluttons of privilege" who were infesting Dar-ul-Islam.

On Friday, 18th of Dhil-Hajj, 35 A.H. (June 17, 656), Ali ibn Abi Talib entered the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina, and walked to the pulpit through the crowd of the Muslims. The crowd sat in an expectant mood, the currents of excitement flashing through it, and it appeared to heave convulsively. There was an almost palpable sense of tension and renewal in the "national" spirit of the Muslims.

Ali held a bow in his hand, and he leaned against the pulpit as the Muslims began to take the oath of allegiance to him. Between him and them, it was "an open covenant openly arrived at," and there was nothing clandestine about it. Most of the Muhajireen and the Ansar who were in Medina, gave him their pledge of loyalty.

Ibn Hajar Makki writes in his famous book al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah:

"The veterans of Badr said (to Ali):'No one is more worthy of khilafat than you. Put out your hand so that we may give you our pledge of loyalty.' And they gave him the pledge of their loyalty."

It was the first time, and the last time, in the history of Islam, that a ruler was not foisted upon the Muslims. They chose their own ruler, and

their choice was spontaneous. Neither force, nor the threat of the use of force, nor pressure nor bribes, nor double talk, were employed in his election. There was no hysteria to grab power. Everyone was free to give or to withhold his pledge. Ali himself was accepting the pledges almost mechanically, lost as he was in the reverie of the times of his master, Muhammad, when he was accepting the pledges of the Quraysh just after the conquest of Makkah in 630.

Edward Gibbon

A tumultuous anarchy of five days was appeased by the inauguration of Ali; his refusal would have provoked a general massacre. In this painful situation he supported the becoming pride of the chief of the Hashemites; declared that he had rather serve than reign; rebuked the presumption of the strangers; and required the formal if not the voluntary assent of the chiefs of the nation.(The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

Talha and Zubayr were the first of the companions of the Prophet to take the oath of allegiance to the new caliph. The Muhajireen and the Ansar were the next. They were followed by the commoners. The first non-companion who took the oath of allegiance to Ali, was Malik ibn Ashter, the most famous swordsman of Arabia.

Hudhaifa ibn al-Yamani was one of the leading companions of Muhammad. He was living in Kufa and was confined to bed with a protracted sickness. When he heard the news of the accession of Ali to the throne, he asked to be taken to the great mosque of Kufa. When the Muslims gathered to say prayers, he ascended the pulpit and read the sermon (khutba). He thanked God for His blessings, and he invoked His blessings upon His Messenger, Muhammad, and upon the members of his family, and said:

"O Muslims! I have received news that in Medina, Ali ibn Abi Talib has been elected the successor of the Messenger of God. I call upon you to give your pledge of loyalty to him because he is with Truth and Truth is with him, and next to the Prophet himself, he is the best of all those who have been created or will ever be created."

Hudhaifa then symbolically placed his right hand on his left hand, and said: "O Lord! Be Thou a Witness that I have taken the oath of allegiance to Ali, my new caliph. Accept my thanks that Thou hast given me enough time to see him become the sovereign of the umma of Muhammad, Thy Apostle."

Hudhaifa was taken back to his home, and a few days later he died. He was one of the most trusted and most beloved friends of Muhammad Mustafa.

The Ansar, in general, had shown very great enthusiasm in bringing Ali to the throne but among them there were some men who withheld their pledge of loyalty from him. They were:

Zayd bin Thabit
Hassan bin Thabit
Kaab bin Malik
Abu Saeed Khudri
Muhammad bin Maslama
Nu'man bin Bashir
Rafa' bin Khudaij
Maslama bin Mukhalid
Kaab bin 'Arja

Among the Makkans, the following companions did not take the pledge of loyalty to Ali:

Abdullah bin Umar bin al-Khattab
Saad bin Abi Waqqas
Mughira bin Shaaba
Abdullah bin Salam
Qadama bin Ma'azoon
Suhaib bin Sinan
Wahban bin Saifi
Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha

When Ali's attention was drawn to those men who had not given him their pledge of loyalty, he said that loyalty was not something that could be obtained by force. To be meaningful, he said, it had to be voluntary. Later, it was reported to him that the same men were quietly slipping out of Medina. Ali made no attempt to stop them. He said that under his rule, everyone was free to stay in Medina or to leave it, and that he himself was not going to force anyone to stay or to leave. His political opponents all left Medina, and most of them went to Syria or to Makkah.

(A few months later, the battle of Basra or the battle of the Camel was fought. Abdullah bin Umar bin al-Khattab and Saad bin Abi Waqqas declared their neutrality in it. Theirs was a moral neutrality over issues of right and wrong though they knew who was right and who was wrong. Some others also claimed that they were "non-aligned," but they were "non-aligned" in favor of Ali's enemies).

Yaqoobi, the historian, says that after the inauguration, Sa'sa'a ibn Sauhan 'Abidi, a companion, said to Ali:

"By God, you have brought honor and glory to the khilafat. Khilafat has not brought honor and glory to you. You have elevated it by accepting it; it has not elevated you. You didn't need it; it needed you."

Another historian, Khatib Baghdadi, has quoted Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal as saying:

"Khilafat was not an ornament for Ali; he was an ornament for khilafat."

Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal put the whole truth in a nutshell. Ali was indeed the ornament and glory of khilafat.

Presently, the Muezzin called adhan for the Friday prayer. Ali, the new caliph, led the congregation. After the prayer, he delivered the inaugural speech. He began his address by praising God, and by thanking Him for His countless and uncountable blessings and mercies one of which was that He had restored his (Ali's) right to him. He invoked God's blessings upon Muhammad Mustafa, and upon the members of his family, and then said:

"O Muslims! You have given me your pledge of loyalty, and I know that you have not done so without forethought. Yet, your aims and my aims in the tasks lying ahead of us, may not necessarily be the same. I want to mobilize you for obedience and service to God; but many among you are hoping that I will give them rich estates or high ranks in the government. This is something that will not happen.

"Remember that there are two ways of life; the right and the wrong. Some of you will adopt the right way and others the wrong. You are free to choose. But if you see that a majority has adopted the wrong way, do not be dismayed or surprised by it. It has often been like that, and the world is full of paradoxes. But Justice and Truth will triumph in the end even if at a given moment they may appear to be on the defensive.

"Verily, when God sent Muhammad as His Messenger to this world, there was not a single soul in all Arabia who knew anything about guidance and rectitude. He led the Arabs out of the wilderness of sin and iniquity until they saw the light of guidance, and found the road to eternal salvation. I was by his side from the beginning of his mission to its end, and I fought against disobedience to God all my life. I never felt weary of the struggle nor I was ever dismayed by the opposition of the guardians and champions of the pre-Islamic order, no matter how formidable it was.

"O Muslims! I call upon you to assist me in my program of reconstruction. God is a Witness to my statement that my paramount objective is to restore justice in Dar-ul-Islam, just as it is His wish that I do so. I shall not rest until I have destroyed injustice. Listen to this with attention: I shall not transgress the bounds of the Book of God for anything. I will not be partial to anyone whoever he may be. In my sight, all of you are equal. I shall promulgate the Laws of God which are enshrined in His Book, and I shall do so in the light of the precedents only of His Apostle, Muhammad, the blessed one.

"My mission today is the same as it was in the times of the Messenger of God, Muhammad; may God bless him and his family, and it's to establish or to reestablish the Kingdom of God on this earth."

In these words, Ali expressed the policy of his government. He defined his aims, and explained how he would realize them. He focused on refurbishing the highest office in Islam, and he outlined the principles of his political philosophy.

The men of perception could sense that Ali's government was going to be very different from the governments of the past, not only in style, expression and emphasis, but also in character, substance and philosophy. They sensed that there was going to be an absolute and qualitative difference between them. They knew that he would check the erosion and corrosion of private and public standards of morality. His accession to the throne, therefore, was not welcome to the guardians of a social system the underpinnings of which were privilege and force, and laxity and license.

Astoundingly, it appeared as if history was going to repeat itself. In Makkah, Muhammad Mustafa was confronted by the guardians of a social system which rested upon privilege, force and exploitation. When he tried to change that system, its guardians challenged him. Their challenge led to armed conflict. Now Ali was confronted with the same system, and his attempt to change it, was also going to end in armed conflict with its guardians.

On the other hand, Ali's accession to the throne was very welcome to another class of people – the one composed of the poor, the destitute, the disabled, the powerless, the exploited, and those who lived in fear and terror. The members of this class knew, as if by instinct, that Ali would give them freedom from fear and poverty. They knew too that given the opportunity, Ali would work on the whole ecology of Muslim society, and would change it. The rhythm, the lilt and the tenor of his speeches lighted little candles of new hope and new idealism in their hearts, and

they could foresee that he would revive the political heritage of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, in his government.

The State of the Umma at Ali's Accession to the Throne

When Ali took the reins of the government in his hands, he was confronted with a most alarming situation. The whole country was seething with agitation, and his enemies swarmed everywhere like hornets. Two modern Pakistani historians, Professor Sayed Abdul Qadir and Professor Muhammad Shuja-ud-Din, have summed up the state of the Dar-ul-Islam in 656 as follows:

Muslims were no longer united. They had split into many camps. Most Muslims put their own interests ahead of the collective interests of the umma.

The recent conquests had delivered into the hands of the Muslims the immense wealth of two of the richest empires of the world – the Persian and the Roman. Everyone wanted a share out of this bonanza, and tried to grab all that one could. In the ruthless quest for money, most Muslims quietly put aside the ideals of Islam as if they were irrelevant.

Though Talha and Zubayr, two of the most powerful companions, were the first to take the oath of allegiance to Ali, they were also the first to repudiate it. By breaking their pledge, they pushed the umma into civil war.

Muawiya was Uthman's governor in Syria. The rebellion of Talha and Zubayr against the lawful authority in Medina, encouraged him also to defy it. Ali invited him to give his pledge of loyalty to him but he refused, and instead, demanded from him (from Ali) action against the murderers of Uthman. Muawiya had little interest in Uthman, but he had great interest in compounding Ali's difficulties. He hoped that Ali would try to penalize all those men who had rebelled against Uthman; they would resist him, and their resistance would lead to civil war. Civil war in Medina, he figured, would make it possible for him to seize the khilafat.

But Ali did not walk into this trap, and said to Muawiya: "First give me your pledge of loyalty, and let me restore peace in the empire. Once conditions return to normal, then we shall, all of us, bring the killers of Uthman to trial, and justice shall prevail." But Muawiya had no intention of taking the oath of loyalty to Ali. He, therefore, kept insisting on the arrest and the execution of the murderers of Uthman.

Commenting upon Muawiya's answer to Ali, the two professors further say:

"In our opinion, Ali was absolutely right. The interests of individuals, no matter how important they may be, cannot be sacrificed over the interests of the 'nation.' Whatever the personal tragedies of some important figure, the integrity of the state must be protected at all costs. 'National' interests remain paramount, and cannot be sacrificed over the interests of an individual. To assure the security of the dominion of Islam is the first responsibility of the head of the Muslim umma. If Ali had acted upon Muawiya's suggestion, war would have erupted in every part of the empire. But Ali's enemies did not share his solicitude for peace, and their attitude led to civil war among the Muslims. If Talha, Zubayr and Muawiya had any sincerity, they would have subordinated their own interests to the interests of Islam, and Muslims would not have shed each other's blood." (History of Islam, Part I)

The foregoing is a correct assessment of the political scene in the House of Islam when Ali took charge of the government. Many other historians have also analyzed the events which took place before the civil war of the Muslims. They have tried to pinpoint its causes but most of them, it appears, have missed an important point, or if they have not, then they have tried to suppress it.

The collapse of the house of Saqifa was bound to be followed by much turbulence. But the point which the historians have been unwilling to admit is that the dragon's teeth which sprouted during Ali's caliphate, had all be sown in the times of his predecessors. The rebellions which broke out in his time, all had their roots in the past. Sir John Glubb, a modern historian, writes about the caliphate of Umar bin Abdul Aziz as follows:

"The reign of Umar bin Abdul Aziz, was remarkably free from sedition and civil strife, yet it may be argued that it was in his time that the seeds were sown of that revolution which was utterly to destroy the dynasty. This was not surprising but rather in accordance with normal political development. For it has often occurred that a country has remained quiet throughout periods of arbitrary and autocratic rule but that sedition has broken out as soon as a more just and liberal administration has been established. Thus the benevolent khilafat of Umar bin Abdul Aziz inaugurated the movement which was to lead to the ruin of his family." (The Empire of the Arabs, p. 175, 1963)

Sir John Glubb has made both a right and a wrong deduction in the foregoing paragraph. He is right in stating that "it has often occurred that a country has remained quiet throughout periods of arbitrary and autocratic rule but that sedition has broken out as soon as a more just and liberal administration has been established." The empire of the Arabs was

quiet throughout the periods of the arbitrary and autocratic rule of the Saqifa government but sedition broke out as soon as the just and liberal administration of Ali was established.

But we cannot agree with the historian when he claims that it was in the time of Umar ibn Abdul Aziz that "the seeds were sown of that revolution which was utterly to destroy the (Umayyad) dynasty." Such seeds were sown not in the time of Umar bin Abdul Aziz but were sown both by his predecessors and successors.

Nor can we agree with the assertion of the historian that "the benevolent khilafat of Umar ibn Abdul Aziz inaugurated the movement which was to lead to the ruin of his family." The truth is just the contrary. It is most probable that the saintly conduct of Umar bin Abdul Aziz gave a reprieve to the Umayyads, and that, but for him, they might have perished much earlier than they did.

Umar bin Abdul Aziz does not fit the stereotype of the Umayyads. He was so God-fearing and God-loving and they were so godless that they just could not coexist. They liquidated him through poison.

Dr. Hamid-ud-Din

There was no great campaign nor any new country was conquered in the caliphate of Umar bin Abdul Aziz. And yet, his caliphate is very important in the history of Islam because of the reforms he instituted. He revived true Islamic democracy and the traditions of the Khulfa-i-Rashida (the rightly-guided caliphs).

From the time of Muawiya, the caliphate had become the personal government of the caliph. All those evils which are a part of the autocratic and despotic governments, had entered the caliphate. The people had lost their freedom. Bayt-ul-Mal (the public treasury) had become the private purse of the ruler. Nothing from it was spent to relieve the distress of the poor, and all of it was spent on the luxury and the pleasures of the ruling class. Umar bin Abdul Aziz resolved to put an end to these practices. The first thing he did, was to seize the vast estates which the Umayyad barons had appropriated for themselves.

Many unfair and illegal means were adopted to bring extra revenues in the state treasury. For example, those Dhimmis (non-Muslims living under the protection of the Islamic State), who accepted Islam, were forced to pay jizya (poll-tax). According to the Qur'anic law, only non-Muslim citizens of the Islamic State have to pay jizya. Umar bin Abdul Aziz sent orders to all the governors in the provinces that if a Dhimmi accepts Islam, jizya must not be charged from him. He put an end to this

practice, and many hundreds of thousands of Dhimmis became Muslim after the promulgation of this order.

Muawiya had begun the custom of cursing Ali ibn Abi Talib in public. He himself and his governors and state functionaries used most intemperate and abusive language from the pulpits in the mosques for Ali. After Muawiya, his successors carried on this practice. But Umar bin Abdul Aziz stopped it. He ordered his governors to read verses of Qur'an from the pulpits instead of cursing Ali.

These reforms were not welcomed by the Umayyad hierarchy, and the caliph's love for fair-play and justice did not make him very popular with it. The Umayyad barons believed that if he ruled the empire for any considerable length of time, then they would lose their power and their perquisites. They, therefore, hatched a conspiracy, and administered poison to him in his food. He died from the effects of this poison in Rajab of 101 A.H. (A.D. 720). (History of Islam, published by Ferozsons Ltd., Karachi and Lahore, Pakistan, pp. 324, 331, 332, 333, 1971).

It was inevitable that a man like Umar bin Abdul Aziz would become a martyr. He is one of the martyrs of Islam. May God have mercy on his noble soul.

Ali faced challenges of monumental scope. But he was not overawed by them. With a pure heart and a mind totally committed to God's Will, he began the work of restoring peace and God's rule to the House of Islam. Oath-taking for Ali was hardly over when rebellions erupted all around him. If he dealt with one of them, another reared its head. Thus the few years of his reign were spent in trying to quell them. Some of his critics insinuated that the rebellions were the result of his "imprudence."

The rebellions in Ali's reign were not caused by his imprudence. As pointed out above, they had their roots in the past. Any other man would have faced the same set of problems, and it is most probable that he would have been unable to grapple with them.

Under the circumstances, Ali ran the administration of the country, and also tried to contain the rebellions as was his duty. He defeated one group of rebels in Basra, and he would have defeated the other in Siffin if the latter had not taken recourse to treachery. Even during these turbulent times, he carried out important economic and social reforms.

Though the causes of the rebellions antedate the caliphate of Ali himself, a few of them may be amplified as follows for a better understanding of the events which took place later.

1. Ali's policy was purely Qur'anic. He was not going to compromise with Islamic ethics and principles for the sake of hanging on to power

and authority. If he had also adopted the policy of realpolitik, he would have been eminently successful but doing so would have changed the character of his government from Islamic to "Aristotelian."

Ahmad Hasan Zayyat of Egypt, says in his book, Adab al-Araby (p. 174):

"Ali knew absolutely no flexibility in matters of religion, and he knew no double-dealing in worldly matters. It was this sublimity of his character of which Muawiya took every advantage."

2. Ali did not try to please the rich and the powerful at the expense of the poor and the weak. He invariably put the interests of the poor and the weak ahead of the interests of the Arab aristocracy. The Arab aristocracy resented this, and showed him its resentment.

When distributing the revenues of the state treasury, Ali made no distinction between high and low, rich and poor, and Arab and non-Arab. In his sight, they were all equal. The Arab lords protested against such treatment but he ignored their protests. Soon their protests exploded in civil war.

3. As soon as Ali took charge of the government, he dismissed all the governors and officers appointed by Uthman. But many of them had no intention of giving up their positions.

Dismissal of Uthman's Governors

When Ali took charge of the government, Uthman's governors and tax collectors were plundering the country without any fear of being questioned by the central government. Ali's first act was to issue orders of their dismissal.

Mughira bin Shaaba was one of the companions of the Prophet. Umar had appointed him governor of Kufa but Uthman had dismissed him. He had not taken the oath of allegiance to Ali but he advised him against making any radical changes in policy and personnel. He said that if the governors appointed by Uthman did not acknowledge his (Ali's) authority as caliph, then he could not remove them from their jobs. He warned Ali that if he dismissed them summarily, before consolidating his own power, they would rebel against his authority.

Ali's first cousin, Abdullah ibn Abbas, also gave him advice which, in substance, was the same as that of Mughira. Prudence, he said, dictated caution at the moment.

But such advice was not acceptable to Ali. He believed that he was accountable to God for all his deeds, and he could not, therefore, allow unworthy and corrupt men to rule over the Muslims. He, in fact, considered himself accountable to God, not only for his own deeds, but also

for the deeds of his governors. He, therefore, placed his trust in God, knowing that he was doing the right thing, and refused to rescind his orders.

Colonel Osborne

Ali had been advised by several of his counselors to defer the dismissal of the corrupt governors previously appointed until he himself was secure against all enemies. The Bayard of Islam, the hero without fear and without reproach refused to be guilty of any duplicity or compromise with injustice. This uncompromisingly noble attitude cost him his state and life, but such was Ali. He never valued anything above justice and truth.

Some people imagine that if Ali had not dismissed Uthman's governors, he would not have provoked them into challenging him. But such an opinion rests upon naiveté. The governors of Uthman would have challenged Ali regardless of what he had done. They were his old enemies.

Following are some of the reasons why Ali dismissed Uthman's governors:

1. Ali's aim was to restore the government of Muhammad Mustafa, and to enforce the Islamic system. To do this, he had to "purify" the government which he had inherited, by excising from it the ravening pack of the Umayyads. In their stead, he had to appoint God-fearing men who believed they were accountable to God for all that they did.

2. Muslims had requested Uthman to remove his conceited and egoistic governors, and to appoint pious men in their stead. But he turned a deaf ear to their request whereupon they took other steps to force a change of governors. If Ali had temporized in this matter, they would have toppled his government just as they toppled the government of his predecessor.

3. If Ali had not dismissed the governors of Uthman, he would have made himself vulnerable to the charge of "guilt by association."

4. Muawiya was not content with ruling Syria alone; he wanted to rule the whole empire of the Muslims as its khalifa. When he noticed that Uthman had made many enemies for himself, he tried to take advantage of the situation. He suggested to Uthman that he should leave Medina, and go with him (with Muawiya) to Syria, where, he assured him, he would be safe whereas in his own capital, he warned him, he might be killed. Muawiya had very good reasons to try to take Uthman to Damascus. Once in Damascus, Uthman would have become a "figurehead khalifa." Muawiya would have taken all his authority out of his hands into

his own, and would, thus, have become khalifa de facto in his (Uthman's) lifetime, and de jure after his death. But Uthman did not go to Syria, and Muawiya's strategy did not work. But when Uthman was killed, he launched his campaign against Ali seeking vengeance for his blood. Ali had little choice in the matter but to dismiss him.

5. Uthman had appointed governors not because they had any ability or because they loved to serve the Muslims. He appointed them only because they were related to him. Ali considered these appointments a trespass on the rights of those men who were qualified by their ability, piety, and service to Islam, to rule the Muslims. He, therefore, removed them.

6. Uthman had appointed members of his own family as governors of the provinces. His governors had men and materials necessary for war. Uthman was in a state of siege in his palace for 49 days. He sent many appeals to them to come and rescue him but they did not come, and he was killed. If these governors could abandon their own benefactor so casually, how could Ali depend upon them in an exigency to obey him? He, therefore, decided not to be at their mercy.

A certain Abu Tufail Kinani, a resident of Medina, once went to Damascus to see Muawiya. When they met, the following exchange took place between them:

Muawiya: Where were you when Uthman was killed?

Kinani: I was in Medina.

Muawiya: Did you do anything to save his life from his enemies?

Kinani: No.

Muawiya: Why not? You knew that it was your duty to do your utmost to save him.

Kinani: I suppose it was. But whatever it was that prevented you from trying to save his life, also prevented me from trying to save his life.

The New Governors

In Moharram of 36 A.H., Ali appointed the following governors:

1. Qays ibn Saad Ansari, the governor of Egypt.

Qays was able to enter Egypt without opposition and to take charge of the government. In Egypt, he found the Muslims divided into three groups. One was composed of his own supporters; the second of his opponents, i.e., the supporters of Uthman; and the third group was undecided in its loyalty. Qays decided not to meddle with the last two groups, but to give his whole-hearted attention to the administration of the country.

Qays, in physical appearance, was the most impressive man in Medina. He was tall, stern and powerful in build; and he was noted for his knowledge, piety and eloquence. He was also a man of great perception and foresight, and was more than a match for men like Muawiya, Amr bin Aas and Mughira bin Shaaba in ingenuity and intelligence. But like his own master, Ali, he too did not believe that ends justified the means. His philosophy of life was governed by the principle that political policy must be subject to the ethics of Qur'an.

2. Uthman bin Hunaif, the governor of Basra.

Uthman was also able to enter Basra and to take charge of the government. He too found the Muslims in Basra divided into three groups as Qays had found in Egypt, and he too adopted the same policy as Qays had in Egypt.

Uthman bin Hunaif belonged to a distinguished family of the Ansars. He was a close friend of the Prophet. During the khilafat of Umar, he was the financial commissioner of Iraq.

3. Ammara bin Shihab Ansari, the governor - designate of Kufa.

Ammara left Medina to take charge of his duties in Kufa. But when he reached Zabala, a way-station on the road to Iraq, he met one Talha bin Khuwaylid Asadi, coming from Kufa. He advised Ammara to return to Medina, or else, he said, he would be killed in Kufa. Thereupon, Ammara did not go to Kufa, and returned to Medina.

4. Sahl bin Hunaif Ansari, the governor - designate of Syria.

Sahl left Medina. Before he reached the Syrian frontier, he met a body of cavalry. They asked him who he was and where he was going. He told them that he was the new governor of Syria. They said they were Syrians and that they did not acknowledge anyone as their ruler except Muawiya. They also added that if he went any further, he would be killed. Thereupon, Sahl did not enter Syria, and returned to Medina.

Sahl was the brother of Uthman bin Hunaif. He too was a companion of the Prophet, and had fought in all his battles, distinguishing himself in them by his gallantry.

5. Obaidullah ibn Abbas, the governor of Yemen.

Obaidullah was the first cousin of Muhammad and Ali. He entered Yemen without opposition and took charge of the government. Yayla bin Umayya who was Uthman's governor in Yemen, had left before his arrival, and had taken the state treasury with him.

Qathm ibn Abbas, the governor - designate of Makkah.

Qathm was the younger brother of Obaidullah. He is said to have borne a striking resemblance to the Prophet. He was still in Medina

when Makkah became a center of opposition to Ali. He, therefore, had to wait until conditions returned to normal in Makkah. After the death of Ali, he left Arabia, went to Samarkand in Central Asia, and died there.

A few months after his accession to the throne, Ali had to leave Medina for Basra to take up the challenge of the rebels, and he appointed Sahl bin Hunaif Ansari as governor of the capital in his own absence.

After the battle of Basra, Ali appointed Abdullah ibn Abbas as the new governor of that city. Abdullah was an "understudy" of his master, Ali, and won great fame for his knowledge. He was one of the earliest authorities on the science of the exegesis of Qur’an. He died in Ta'if at the age of 70.

Chapter 60

Prelude to the War

AS NOTED BEFORE, ALI'S GOVERNORS HAD BEEN UNABLE TO ENTER Syria and Kufa because of the opposition of Uthman's governors to him. But Syria and Kufa were not the only centers of sedition. Trouble was brewing for Ali in Medina itself threatening the security of the State. He was therefore compelled to defer action on the problems arising from sedition in distant provinces for sometime.

As noted before, when Ali was inducted into office as the caliph of the Muslims, two the most powerful men in Medina, viz., Talha and Zubayr, were the first to take the oath of loyalty to him. Both of them, like many others, had grown immensely rich during the reign of the three khalifas before Ali. They kept growing wealthier and wealthier, and now, with Ali's accession to the throne, they also wanted to become the governors of the rich provinces of Basra and Kufa. When they were taking the oath of allegiance to Ali, they were secretly hoping that as a quid pro quo, Ali would appoint them governors. But Ali selected other men as governors, and he did not offer them anything. This disappointed them. Though they were heart-broken, they did not mull over their frustration, and being pragmatic men, decided to act for themselves.

Talha and Zubayr worked out a plan to circumvent Ali. They called on him, and informed him that they were going to Makkah to perform umra (the lesser pilgrimage). As soon as the two grandees were in Makkah, they broke their pledge of loyalty to Ali. They declared that they had given their pledge with many mental reservations. At this time Ayesha, the daughter of Abu Bakr, and one of the widows of the Prophet, was also in Makkah. She had performed the Hajj but did not return to Medina when she heard that Ali had become caliph, and she declared that she would seek vengeance for the murder of Uthman. Talha and Zubayr called on Ayesha at her home in Makkah. They briefed her on the events in Medina. What she heard from them, strengthened her in her resolution to

become the champion of Uthman. In Talha and Zubayr she found enthusiastic supporters in her "enterprise." This made up the "triumvirate" of Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr, arrayed in a confrontation with Ali, the successor of Muhammad Mustafa, and the lawful sovereign of the Muslims. The "linchpin" of this triumvirate was the hatred of Ali.

A brief introduction of each of the "triumvirs" is given hereunder to enable the reader to understand the concatenation of the events that led to the second civil war in Islam.

Talha bin Obaidullah

Talha's father, Obaidullah and Abu Bakr's father, Abu Qahafa, were brothers. Talha's mother was the daughter of Hadhrami, and his father, Obaidullah, was her second husband. For a short time, she had also been the wife of Abu Sufyan, the father of Muawiya but he had divorced her.

Talha was married to Umm Kulthoom, the daughter of Abu Bakr, and this made him Ayesha's brother-in-law. When Abu Bakr appointed Umar his successor, Talha strongly protested, and drew his attention to the highhandedness of the khalifa-designate. Later, when Umar himself was dying, he had made Talha a member of his electoral committee.

Talha broke his pledge of loyalty to Ali because the latter did not make him the governor of Basra. He had, probably, the same reason for his opposition, earlier, to Uthman, who also had not appointed him a governor. Baladhuri, the Arab historian, says in his book, Ansab-ul-Ashraf, vol. I, p. 113:

"Among the companions of the Messenger of God, there were few who castigated Uthman so viciously as Talha did."

When Uthman's palace was besieged by the rebels, it was Talha who did not let his (Uthman's) slaves bring water in it. At night, he shot arrows at the palace but Uthman knew about it. Tabari, the historian, says in his History, vol. III, p. 411:

"Uthman often prayed:’O God! Save me from the harm that Talha might do to me. He is the one who has inflamed the people against me, and he is the one who has caused my house to be besieged."

Talha's hatred of Uthman must have been colossal. He could not condone his aberrations even after his death. He ordered Uthman's bier and his pall-bearers to be stoned. Uthman could not even be buried in the cemetery of the Muslims; he had to be buried in the cemetery of the Jews.

Zubayr bin Awwam

Zubayr's mother was Safiya, the daughter of Abdul Muttalib bin Hashim. Thus his mother was the paternal aunt of Muhammad and Ali.

Zubayr also was married to one of the daughters of Abu Bakr, and this made him a brother-in-law of Ayesha. Like Talha, he too protested to his father-in-law against the appointment of Umar as khalifa. And when Umar was dying, he made Zubayr also a member of his electoral committee.

Ibn Saad says in his Tabqaat that Zubayr was also incredibly rich like Talha.

Zubayr shared Talha's lust for gold and the ambition for political power. He had hoped that Ali would treat him in the same manner as Uthman had treated his cousins, i.e., by making him a governor. After all, he was Ali's cousin.

But Ali did not treat his cousin, Zubayr, as Uthman had treated his cousins. When no doubt was left in Zubayr's mind that Ali would not appoint him a governor, he broke his pledge of loyalty to him, and rose in rebellion against him.

Zubayr shared Talha's hatred of Uthman, and often urged the rebels to kill him.

Ibn Qutayba, the Arab historian, says that a few days after Ali's accession to the throne, Talha and Zubayr came to see him, and the following exchange took place between them:

T & Z: Do you know why we took the oath of loyalty to you?

Ali: You took the oath of loyalty for the same reason as the other Muslims – to obey me.

T & Z: No. We took the oath in the hope that you would reciprocate our gesture by giving us a share in the government. After all, it was with our support that you became the caliph.

Ali: I may consult you in affairs of the government but there is no such thing as a "share" for you in the government.

Talha and Zubayr were deeply mortified at Ali's refusal to share power with them, and following was their comment on the outcome of their meeting with him:

Talha: In Medina, there were three members of the electoral committee. Out of them, one (Saad bin Abi Waqqas) withheld his pledge of loyalty from Ali but Zubayr and I gave him our pledge. Both of us made it possible for him to become khalifa but he has forgotten so soon what we did for him.

Zubayr: We drew up the list of the blunders of Uthman, and we censured him, all for the sake of Ali. During this tumult, Ali stayed in his home. Then, with our help he became khalifa. But as soon as he became khalifa, he forgot our services, and gave all the prize posts to other men.

The purport of these remarks was brought to the attention of Ali. He called Abdullah ibn Abbas, and sought his advice in the matter. Ibn Qutayba writes in his book Kitab-ul-Imama wa-Siyassa, that Abdullah ibn Abbas said:

"It's my opinion that you should appoint Talha governor of Basra, and Zubayr governor of Kufa. This will satisfy them and silence them."

Ali paused to reflect on his cousin's advice, and then said:

"No. I don't think I can agree with you on this point. I know both of them well. If I make them governors, then tyranny, oppression and exploitation will get reprieve in Basra and Kufa, and the cry of the oppressed will be smothered once again. If I were to appoint men like Talha and Zubayr as governors, then I ought to suffer Muawiya also to remain as governor of Syria."

Ibn Qutayba further writes:

"Amr bin Aas, Talha and Zubayr were the first to revile Uthman. They were the first to openly instigate the people to kill him. Talha and Zubayr were the first to take the oath of loyalty to Ali, and both of them were the first to break their solemn pledge."

Ever since Umar had appointed them members of his electoral committee, Talha and Zubayr had nursed the ambition to become khalifa. But Abdur Rahman bin Auf made Uthman khalifa instead of any of them.

A second opportunity to become khalifa came immediately after the death of Uthman. But this time, they sensed that the Muslims did not want them. They realized that no matter what they did, the Muslims would not accept them. Everyone in Medina had seen with his own eyes their conduct toward Uthman during the siege of his palace.

Talha and Zubayr also noticed that it was not Ali who was jockeying to get to the top but the Muslims who were "jockeying" to put him there. Ali's election as caliph was spontaneous, and whatever resistance there was to it, it was from himself. Talha and Zubayr also knew that if they withheld their pledge of loyalty from him, they would make themselves too conspicuous. Not wishing this to happen, they took the oath of loyalty to Ali.

Finding khilafat beyond their reach, Talha and Zubayr eyed Basra and Kufa as consolation prizes for themselves. They hoped that Ali would not ignore their status in the umma, and as members of Umar's electoral committee. They also assumed that Ali could not overlook their prestige and influence with the people of Basra and Kufa. But Ali was not impressed by their status and prestige, and did not give them Basra and

Kufa. Talha and Zubayr realized that Medina had proven to be a rather poor springboard for their ambitions. They, therefore, decided to go to Makkah, and try luck there. Ali made no attempt to stop them. Talha and Zubayr left Medina with treason in their hearts.

If Ali had appointed Talha and Zubayr governors of Basra and Kufa, they would have consolidated their position in their respective provinces, and then they would have repudiated allegiance to the central government. The umma then would have found itself ruled by four independent and mutually hostile rulers - Talha in Basra; Zubayr in Kufa; Muawiya in Syria; and Ali in Hijaz. At the outbreak of the inevitable civil war among them, the Islamic State would have dissolved into anarchy to become a "government" of the Arabian tribes once again as it was in the Times of Ignorance.

It was the vision and genius of Ali that saved the Dar-ul-Islam from such a tragic fate.

It is a well-known fact that governmental decisions and policies, in many cases, are shaped by the pressures of special interest groups. Talha and Zubayr, and their supporters formed such a group. They applied pressure but when it met resistance, they went to war.

Ayesha bint Abu Bakr

Ayesha was the daughter of Abu Bakr, the first khalifa of the Muslims. She was born four years after the Prophet of Islam proclaimed his mission, and she was nine years old when she was married to him. She was his third wife. Since she remained childless, she adopted Abdullah bin Zubayr, the son of her sister, as her own child. It was from this circumstance that she was called Umm Abdullah, the mother of Abdullah.

Ayesha was present in the battle of Uhud. Bukhari says on the authority of Anas that he saw Ayesha and Umm Saleem bringing water in leathern bags, and giving it to the wounded soldiers to drink. Ayesha fiercely hated Ali. She hated him so much that she could not even mention him. Bukhari has recorded the following incident:

"Ayesha says that when the condition of the Apostle of God deteriorated, he sought the permission of his other wives to spend all the time in my chamber as he wanted me to nurse him. That day he was in the chamber of Maymuna. Since he was weak, he had to be supported by two men who brought him from Maymuna's chamber into my room. One of those two men was Abdullah ibn Abbas."

Ayesha's account of this story was reported to Abdullah ibn Abbas, and he said that the other man who supported the Apostle when going from Maymuna's chamber, was Ali.

Historians have tried to find out the reasons why Ayesha hated Ali. One of the reasons is supposed to be the incident of ifk, i.e., "the lie." This incident occurred in the sixth year of the Hijra. When the Medinese army was returning from an expedition to the Banu Mustaliq, Ayesha who had accompanied the Apostle, was inadvertently left behind. She turned up later with a camel driver. The incident occasioned some loose talk among the people, and caused much heart-burning to the Apostle. He is said to have consulted Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha and Ali ibn Abi Talib in this matter. Usama reportedly told him that Ayesha was absolutely innocent but Ali is reported to have said to him that it was unnecessary for him to endure such torment because he could always find other women to marry.

Ayesha also claimed that Ali beat up her maid-servant in an attempt to make her disclose the "truth."

The Prophet was on tenterhooks not knowing what the truth of the matter was when a new revelation came from heaven that exculpated Ayesha of all guilt or blame. Her innocence was upheld and the unpleasant incident was apparently closed.

Though this incident had a happy ending for Ayesha, she never forgave Ali for the "advice" he is alleged to have given to her husband, i.e., to have told him that other women were available to him all the time, and that he ought not to grieve over the incident too much.

If Ali ever gave such advice to the Apostle, then he did nothing more than paraphrase the fifth verse of the 66th chapter of Qur'an (Surah Tahreem) which reads as follows:

It may be if he (the Prophet) divorced you all, that God will give him in exchange consorts better than you…

According to this verse of Qur'an, there were women who were better than the consorts of the Prophet, and God could give them to him.

The story that Ali beat up Ayesha's maid, does not jibe with his character. He was the most chivalrous of men, and even in the battlefield, did not want to be the first to strike at his enemy. He invited his enemy to strike at him first. Only when the enemy had struck a blow, did Ali feel free to defend himself. It is unthinkable that he would beat up a helpless girl. When the army marched out, and Ayesha was left behind, she was all alone, and her maid was not with her. How would she know what had happened if she was not with her mistress? Even if someone had threatened to kill her, she still could not tell anything.

Sir William Muir, the British historian, has pointed out that the narrator of this incident was Ayesha herself, and this, he says, "makes her testimony suspect."

But Ayesha did not need the incident of ifk to hate Ali. Her hatred of Ali went to earlier times – beyond this incident. She was jealous of Khadija, her daughter and her daughter's children. Muhammad was coddling and cuddling the children of the daughter of Khadija all the time, and Ayesha might have thought that if she had any children, he would have loved them as he loved the daughter and the grandchildren of Khadija, but she had none.

To be jealous of the daughter and the grandchildren of Khadija might have been normal and natural for Ayesha. But what was not normal and not natural, especially for a wife of the Messenger of God, was to allow her jealousy to become an ungovernable and irrational obsession.

Ayesha herself often said that though she had never seen Khadija, she was more jealous of her than she was of any other of her co-wives. One reason for her jealousy was that her husband always remembered Khadija with genuine love and gratitude. On one occasion, he was praising and complimenting Khadija when Ayesha lost her patience, and snapped: "Why do you talk about that old woman all the time? Hasn't God given you better wives than her?"

"Never!" answered the Apostle. "God never gave me a better wife than Khadija. She believed in me when others contradicted me. She supported me when I had no one to support me. She was the first one to accept Islam when everyone else was an idolater. And God blessed me with children through her, and through her alone." (Bukhari and Siyar-us-Sahabiyyat)

But Ayesha could not suppress or conceal her hatred of Khadija, her daughter and her grandchildren. Even the death of Khadija and Fatima could not persuade her to forget her old hatred. She hated Ali and the grandchildren of Khadija.

It was inevitable that Ayesha would tangle with Uthman. Once Uthman was using abusive and profane language, from the pulpit, for Abdullah bin Masood, a friend of the Apostle of God, and she had risen to his defense. There had been other occasions when she had tried to cut Uthman to size. A door of her chamber opened into the Mosque, and from time to time she put on its floor a pair of shoes and a shirt which belonged to the Apostle, put her head out, and addressing Uthman when he was in the pulpit, said:

"Before these things which belong to your Prophet, could accumulate any dust on them, you have changed his commandments, his traditions, and his customs, and you have corrupted his religion."

Ayesha had suspected that Uthman "ignored" her. Then he curtailed her stipend. This made her furious. This and many other petty irritations made her a bitter enemy of Uthman. Abbas Mahmud Al-Akkad of Egypt says in his book, Abqarriyet al-Imam Ali (Cairo, 1970), that Ayesha had given the name "Na'thal" to Uthman. Na'thal was an old Jew in Medina. It is said that Uthman's beard bore some resemblance to his beard. Ayesha, in moments of pique, openly incited the people against Uthman, and said: "Kill this Na'thal. He has become a kafir." Umar Farookh writes on page 190 of his book, The History of the Arabic Thought Till the Days of Ibn Khaldoon, published in 1983, by Dar-ul-'Ilm lil-Malaeen, Beirut, Lebanon:

"It is reported that Ayesha used to say: 'Kill this Na'thal (Uthman bin Affan); he has become an apostate.'"

The siege of Uthman's palace had already begun when Ayesha left Medina for Makkah to perform Hajj. Marwan begged her to stay in Medina but she paid no attention, and left the city. During her absence from Medina, Uthman was killed.

In Makkah, Ayesha was exceedingly anxious to hear the news of the events taking place in Medina. After the Hajj, she packed her baggage to return to Medina. Before leaving Makkah, however, she was informed that a man called Akhdhar, had arrived from Medina. She called him and asked him what was happening in Medina, He said:

"Uthman has killed the rebels and has brought the city under control."

Ayesha was shocked to hear this report, and she said:

"Did Uthman kill those people who came to Medina only to protest against tyranny, and to demand justice? By God, we are not pleased with this." (Tabari, History, Vol. III, p. 468)

But on the following day, another traveler came from Medina, and he told Ayesha that the rebels had killed Uthman, and that Akhdhar had given her a wrong report. She said:

"May God put distance between His Mercy and Uthman. Whatever has happened, Uthman brought it upon himself. God does not oppress anyone."

When the news of Uthman's death was confirmed, Ayesha decided to leave Makkah immediately. Her presence in Medina, she believed, was absolutely essential before the election of a new khalifa. She left Makkah but she had not gone far when she met a third traveler, one Obaid bin

Abi Salma, coming from Medina. She asked him what had happened in Medina before he left it. He said:

"Uthman has been killed, and the people of Medina have given the pledge of loyalty to Ali ibn Abi Talib."

The accession of Ali to the throne of caliphate, was not the kind of news that Ayesha was prepared to hear. But hoping that she had not heard the report correctly, she asked: "Did you say that the people of Medina have given the pledge of loyalty to Ali?" Obaid replied: "Yes, they have. And who else was there to whom they could give their pledge of loyalty?"

Ayesha moaned:

"O how I wish, the earth had split open or the sky had fallen on earth if Ali has become the caliph. Now I cannot go to Medina. I shall return to Makkah." (Kamil, History, Vol. III, p. 105)

Ayesha ordered her camel-driver to return to Makkah, and said:

"Uthman was killed while he was innocent. By God, I shall now seek vengeance for his blood."

Ayesha's remark surprised Obaid bin Abi Salma, and he asked:

"O mother of the believers! Are you going to seek vengeance for Uthman's murder? But wasn't he the man you called 'Na'thal,' and were you not the woman who instigated the Muslims to kill him because, as you said, he had become an apostate?"

Ayesha answered:

"Yes, it's true that I called Uthman by that name, and other people also called him by the same name. It is also true that I said that he had gone astray, and that he ought to be corrected. But what I am saying now is truer than what I said before, and what I am saying now is that Uthman had repented before his death. Therefore, when he was killed, he was innocent, and I am going to seek vengeance for his blood."

How did Ayesha know that Uthman had repented? Until she left Medina, he had not repented. Even after she had performed Hajj, and was ready to return to Medina, he had not repented, or else she would not have expressed satisfaction at his murder. But when she heard the news that Ali had become caliph, she suddenly made the discovery that Uthman had repented, and was innocent. She declared that she was Uthman's champion, and that she would launch a campaign to get vengeance for his blood.

Presently Marwan who had left Medina at the accession of Ali to the throne, also arrived in Makkah. He called on Ayesha, and gave her a

graphic account of the murder of Uthman which is said to have deeply moved her, and to have brought her to the edge of tears.

Ayesha launched a two-pronged campaign; she had to prove (1) Uthman's "innocence," and (2) Ali's "guilt."

Travelers carried the news of Ayesha's campaign to Medina. Talha and Zubayr were thrilled to hear the news. They saw a glimmer of hope for themselves in her campaign. They wrote letters to her, gave her their blessings, admired her for her initiative and enterprise; encouraged her and urged her to step up her propaganda against Ali. Soon they themselves were to go to Makkah "to perform umra."

Ayesha, under the guidance of Marwan, began to rally support. The first man to respond to her call, was Abdullah bin Aamir al-Hadhrami, Uthman's governor in Makkah. With him he also brought Saeed bin Aas, Walid bin Aqaba and other Umayyads who were in Makkah, into Ayesha's "camp." In the meantime, Talha and Zubayr also arrived from Medina, and they formed an alliance with Ayesha and Marwan – an alliance against Ali ibn Abi Talib. Now most of the behind-the-scenes sponsors of the assassination of Uthman were present in Makkah. Since there was unity of aims and identity of purpose among them all, the formation of alliance presented no difficulty.

The ostensible aim of this alliance was to seek vengeance for the blood of Uthman, and the allies agreed that there was no better way of getting it than by capturing the caliphate itself. But behind the screen of the quest for vengeance, lurked the lust for power, and the fears of men, and the jealousy and implacable vindictiveness of a woman.

Chapter 61

The Battle of Basra (the battle of Camel)

The Second Civil War in Islam

The Muslims had already fought one civil war during the khilafat of Abu Bakr, the first khalifa. Within the same generation, they now faced the grim specter of fighting another. The first civil war was waged by the government against some of its dissident subjects; the second civil war was waged by some of the dissident subjects against their government.

Professors Sayed Abdul Qadir and Muhammad Shuja-ud-Din, write in their History of Islam, Part I (Lahore, Pakistan):

"Ayesha was returning to Medina from Makkah after Hajj when she heard the news of the assassination of Uthman, and the accession of Ali to the throne of khilafat whereupon she decided not to go to Medina, and to return to Makkah. Talha and Zubayr also arrived in Makkah. Uthman's governor in Makkah was Abdullah bin Aamir Hadhrami. Marwan and other members of the Banu Umayya were staying as his guests. All of them held a meeting and resolved that they would seek vengeance for the blood of Uthman. They raised an army in Makkah of 3000 warriors, and decided, after some discussion, to march on Basra. They occupied Basra, seized the treasury, and they killed 600 Muslims whom they suspected to be opposed to them, and spread terror in the city."

The quest of vengeance for Uthman's blood was only a pretext for war. It was a mask not only for the ambitions of the rebel leaders but also for their crimes. There was no way for them to disguise their intentions, ambitions and resolutions as well as their complicity in Uthman's murder except by claiming that they were his paladins. One thing that was clear to everyone was that if Ali was able to consolidate his government, one of the first things that he would do, would be to institute investigations into the murder of Uthman, and it was inevitable that the trail of criminal prosecutions would lead to the rebel leaders themselves. The role they had played during the siege of the palace of Uthman, was not hidden

from anyone. The eye-witnesses were all present in Medina and they would have testified under oath what they had seen. For the rebel leaders, there was, therefore, only one way to forestall Ali and his inexorable justice, and that was to raise the cry of vengeance before he could set the apparatus of law in working order. This is precisely what they did. Some among them even admitted that what they were doing, was to atone for their sins, and there was no better way to atone for sins than to "wash blood with blood." They had killed one caliph, and now they were going to kill another. This was the only way, they argued, for them to win "salvation."

No one knows by what right Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr were seeking vengeance for Uthman's blood. None of them bore any relationship to Uthman. Each of them belonged to a different clan. Uthman's next of kin were his widow, Naila, and his sons and daughters, and they were not seeking any vengeance from anyone. It was only after his assassination that Uthman found self-appointed paladins of both sexes, ready and eager to "protect" him!

Ayesha could not see Ali on the throne of khilafat. Her hatred of Ali was overpowering. If someone other than Ali had become khalifa, she might not have embarked upon the cynical adventure in which tens of thousands of Muslims were killed. Whereas, the real casus belli in her case was her undiluted hatred of Ali, she also found another reason to press the campaign against him with vigor. In the event of her success in removing Ali from the center of power, she was going to make her nephew and adopted son, Abdullah bin Zubayr, the new khalifa.

Three of Uthman's governors who had been dismissed by Ali were Abdullah bin Aamir Hadhrami of Makkah; Ya'la bin Umayya of Yemen; and Abdullah bin Aamir bin Kurayz of Basra. After their dismissal, the first one stayed in Makkah, and the other two also came to Makkah. They brought the treasury with them. Some citizens of Makkah also made generous contributions to the coffers of the rebels. In this manner, the latter found the funds necessary to underpin their war.

The rebel leaders held a meeting at the house of Abdullah bin Aamir Hadhrami, the ex-governor of Makkah, to decide what they had to do. An invasion of Medina, and a march to Syria, were considered but were not found practicable for various reasons. Finally, Abdullah bin Aamir bin Kurayz, the ex-governor of Basra, suggested that they should go to Basra. This suggestion appealed to everyone, and was accepted by all. Talha eagerly welcomed it, and said that many families of his clan were living in Basra, and that he could count upon their support.

The rebel leaders then worked out their strategy: first they would take possession of Basra; with Basra as their base, they would occupy Kufa where Zubayr had many supporters. With Basra and Kufa in their hands, they figured, it would be possible for them to isolate Ali in Hijaz, invade his territories; defeat him, and wrest khilafat from him.

The professed aim of the rebels was to kill those men who had killed Uthman. The men who had killed Uthman, were all in Medina but his self-appointed champions were marching upon Basra – 800 miles to the east, in Iraq!

Talha and Zubayr requested Abdullah bin Umar bin al-Khattab also to accompany them to Basra but he refused to go.

Ayesha pressed Hafsa bint Umar bin al-Khattab and the other widows of the Prophet who were still in Makkah after Hajj, to go with her to Basra, and to take part in the war against the caliph. All of them refused except Hafsa. She was willing to go with Ayesha but her brother, Abdullah bin Umar, forbade her to do so.

Umm Salma was one of the widows of the Prophet. Ayesha sent her a letter in Medina inviting her to take part in her campaign. Umm Salma replied to her as follows:

"O Ayesha! Have you forgotten that the Messenger of God had ordered you to stay at home and not to transgress the limits imposed by our Faith? The jihad of women is in restraint. Their eyes should not be bold, and their voice should not be loud. Do you think that if the Messenger of God were to catch you racing camels in the desert, he would be very pleased? If I were to disobey my husband, I would never be able to face him again. Therefore, fear God at all times. It would be in your own interest to stay at home, and not to go on a wild adventure."

Ayesha had claimed that she was going on a mission of peace. If she was, then it was the strangest of all missions of peace. She was escorted to Basra by 3000 warriors, bristling with deadly weapons, and thirsting for the blood of innocent Muslims!

At length all preparations were completed, and the army of Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr, marched out of Makkah, with great fanfare, toward its distant destination – Basra.

As the Makkan army was marching toward the east, someone raised the question who would become khalifa in the event of victory over Ali. Talha's son said his father would become khalifa but Zubayr's son countered him by asserting that his father alone would become khalifa.

An animated argument began which might have led to an exchange of blows between the two young men when Ayesha arrived at the scene.

She interposed between them, and their supporters, and dismissed the uncomfortable question as being untimely.

Though Ayesha suppressed the question of leadership at the time, she nevertheless decreed that her nephew, Abdullah bin Zubayr, would lead the army in prayer. This ordinance had special significance in the context of the times. On one occasion, during the last sickness of the Prophet, Ayesha's father, Abu Bakr, had led some Muslims in prayer. The fact that he had led them in prayer, was used, immediately after the death of the Prophet, both as an "argument" in his (Abu Bakr's) favor, and as his (Abu Bakr's) "qualification" to become khalifa.

Ayesha loved her nephew, Abdullah bin Zubayr, more than his own mother did, and she was determined to make him the next khalifa. Upon her insistence, even Zubayr had to stand behind his own son to say his prayers. As Ayesha saw it, in the light of her own father's precedent, no one in the rebel army could claim that he had the same "qualifications" to become khalifa as her nephew had since he and he alone had led the army in prayer.

The question of leadership was bugging Saeed bin Aas also. He took it up with Talha and Zubayr and the following exchange took place between them:

Saeed: If you win the war against Ali, who will become the next khalifa?

Talha: Whoever is chosen by the Muslims, would become their khalifa.

Saeed: When you left Makkah, you declared that your aim in waging war against Ali, was to get vengeance for the blood of Uthman. If your aims have not changed, then you ought to make one of his (Uthman's) sons the new khalifa, and both of them are here with us in the army.

Talha: Do you think that we shall bypass the senior Muhajireen and make one of your raw youths our khalifa? Never.

Saeed then understood that the talk of seeking vengeance for the blood of Uthman was only a hoax, and the real aim of the "triumvirs" was to grab power for themselves.

A distinguished visitor to the rebel camp was Mughira bin Shaaba. He talked with Ayesha and Marwan, and advised them to abandon their plan for the invasion of Basra. He said to Marwan:

"… if you are going to Basra to hunt out the murderers of Uthman, then you should know that they are here in your own camp and not in Basra. They are the generals of your army. They killed Uthman because each of them wanted to become khalifa. But they failed, and after their failure, they cooked up this story of seeking vengeance."

But Ayesha and Marwan had no intention to abandon their grand design of conquest. They did not accept Mughira's advice whereupon he, Saeed bin Aas, Abdullah bin Khalid, and a few others separated themselves from the rebel army, and went to Ta'if.

The rebel army resumed its march toward Basra but a weird incident made it halt once again. As Ayesha rode past a certain well in a village on the highway, some pariah dogs gathered around her camel, and began to bark at her furiously. Ayesha put her head out of the litter, and asked the son of Talha if he knew the name of the village they were passing through. He said that they were passing through a hamlet called Hawab.

When Ayesha heard the name Hawab, she was thrown into a state of great agitation. She ordered her camel-driver to make the camel sit, and said that she had to return to Medina immediately instead of going any further toward Basra.

This sudden change of direction and destination by Ayesha, surprised the son of Talha, and he asked her why she could not go to Basra. She said that recollection came to her of a prediction of the Apostle of God, and she told him what it was in the following words:

"He (the Apostle) was with his wives one day, and addressing them he said: ‘A day will come when the dogs of Hawab will bark at one of you, and that would be the day when she would be in manifest error.' He then turned toward me, and said: ‘Beware O Humayra! lest you be that wife.' And now I can hear and see that the dogs of Hawab are barking at me. So I am the one in manifest error."

But Talha's son was not convinced, and said:

"O mother of believers! pay no attention to the barking dogs. We have more important things to do. Let's, therefore, move toward the destination which is beckoning us from the east."

But Ayesha appeared determined to go back to Medina. Alarmed by her insistence upon returning to Medina, Talha's son called Abdullah bin Zubayr hoping that he would dissuade her from deserting the rebel army.

Abdullah bin Zubayr arrived at the scene and he too heard Ayesha's story. But he had to stop her at any cost. If she were to desert the rebel army, the whole effort of the rebel leaders to seize power, would collapse there and then. Furthermore, they would have no place to go to. He, therefore, told his aunt that the village the dogs of which had barked at her, and had so visibly shaken her up, was not Hawab; it was some other

obscure village. Ayesha, however, was not satisfied, and declared that she would not go to Basra.

Abdullah bin Zubayr now had to take desperate measures to reassure his aunt that in going to Basra, she was not going astray, and that the barking of some stray dogs ought not to unnerve her. He then took an oath that the army had left Hawab far behind. He also rounded up fifty desert Arabs, brought them before Ayesha, and all of them swore that Hawab in truth was very distant from where she was.

Arab historians say that the "testimony" which Abdullah bin Zubayr produced before Ayesha, was the first perjury in Islam.

Tabari, the dean of the Arab historians, has also recorded this incident. He adds that through the efforts of her adopted son, Abdullah bin Zubayr, and his fifty "witnesses," Ayesha was at last convinced that the dogs barking at her did not belong to Hawab after all, but to some other village. She dismissed the incident as a minor contretemps. Her conscience was "salved," and she was ready to ride toward Basra.

At this time, Ali was occupied in taking stock of the situation. Of all his enemies, he knew, that Muawiya, the governor of Syria, was the most dangerous, and he felt that he ought to give him his first attention. But then he heard that Talha and Zubayr who had earlier left Medina for Makkah "to perform umra," had repudiated their oath of loyalty to him, and that they and Ayesha, who was already in Makkah, had raised the standard of rebellion against him. It was also reported to him that the three leaders were already advancing with a well equipped army toward the key city of Basra in Iraq with the intention of capturing it.

Ayesha had never made a secret of her unfriendliness to Ali but he could never imagine that she would go to the extent of waging war upon him. To him, an alliance of Talha, Zubayr and Muawiya had seemed possible but an alliance of Talha, Zubayr and Ayesha never. But here she was, with her allies, posing a more direct threat to the security of the Islamic State than Muawiya himself.

Ali was compelled to suspend everything in order to deal with the challenge of Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr. He lamented their unreasonable and unseasonable belligerence, and sought to dissuade them from causing the bloodshed of the Muslims which was inevitable if they revolted against the lawful authority. He sent a letter to Ayesha the purport of which was as follows:

"In the name of God Who is Most Beneficent and Most Merciful.

You have left your home in direct contravention of the commandments of God and His Messenger, and now you are sowing seeds of civil

war among the Muslims. Just pause for a moment and think about this: What do you have to do with armies and wars? Is it your job to fight? And fight against whom? Against the Muslims? Your place is in your home. God has commanded you to stay in your home. Therefore, fear Him, and do not disobey Him, and return immediately to Medina."

Ayesha received Ali's letter but his appeal had no effect upon her, and she did not even acknowledge it.

Ali sent similar letters to Talha and Zubayr and they also did not reply to him.

Ali realized that the rebel leaders were bent on shedding Muslim blood. Wishing to prevent them from doing so, he decided to intercept them. But he could intercept their army only with an army of his own, and he had no army!

The new caliph had to raise an army if he were to prevent the rebel army from reaching and occupying Basra. He went into the mosque, informed the Muslims what the rebels planned to do, explained to them the need for an army to meet their challenge and he called upon them to come forward as volunteers.

Ali was shocked at the response he got to his appeal. No one volunteered to fight against the rebels. He repeated his appeal and the response was the same.

After each prayer, Ali appealed to the congregation to rise in defense of lawfully constituted government. He reminded them that he had taken charge of their government only upon their own insistence. He also reminded them that he had made his own acceptance of the caliphate contingent upon their pledge to obey him - in peace and in war. The Muslims, apparently, had forgotten their pledge. Ali felt he was immobilized.

After many days, however, one man stood up in the mosque and told Ali that he would obey his orders. Some others, also conscionable like him, followed his example. Soon Ali was able to put together a tiny force of 700 volunteers ready to obey him.

Sir John Glubb

As soon as Ali heard that Zubair, Talha and Aisha had left Mecca, he decided to follow them, but found considerable difficulty in raising a force for the purpose. Only some three months before, the Companions and the people of Medina had begged him to be khalif. Now few would support him although the apparently unscrupulous Zubair and Talha had raised 3000 men from Mecca and the surrounding tribes.

In October 656, four months after the murder of Othman, Ali set out after Zubair and Talha. He had with him only 700 men. Too weak to proceed, he camped on a desert well in Nejed. (The Great Arab Conquests, p. 318, 1967)

Before leaving Medina, Ali called on Umm Salma, one of the widows of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and bade her farewell. Umm Salma said to him:

"In the name of God, I deliver you into His protection. By His power and His majesty, you alone are with truth, and all your enemies are in error. If it were not the command of God to the wives of His Messenger to stay at home, I would have accompanied you in this campaign." (Abul Fida)

Umm Selma had a son by her first marriage. She offered him to Ali, and said:

"He is my only child. He is all that I have in this world. I offer him to you. He will, if necessary, sacrifice his life for you."

Ali was deeply moved by Umm Salma's gesture. He thanked her, and took a heart-breaking leave from her not knowing if he would ever return to Medina. Her son accompanied him to Iraq.

Ali appointed Sehl ibn Hunaif Ansari the governor of Medina in his absence, and he sent Qathm ibn Abbas to Makkah to take charge of that city as its governor.

The last thing that Ali did in Medina, was to visit the graves of Muhammad Mustafa, and of Fatima Zahra – the father and the daughter. Muhammad was his guide, benefactor and friend, and Fatima was his wife. He bade farewell to both of them with a heart full of sadness and eyes full of tears.

Upon his arrival in Iraq, Ali and his small force encamped at a place called Dhi-Qaar. Abdullah ibn Abbas, his cousin, reports the arrival, in the camp, of a new friend, as follows:

"We were in Dhi-Qaar when one afternoon, we saw a man coming toward the camp. He was very old, and very frail. His only possessions were a small bag of rations and a goat-skin of water. Presently he entered the camp, and sought audience with Ali. When he was taken before Ali, he identified himself as Oways Qarni from Yemen. As soon as we heard his name, we knew that he was the unseen friend and beloved of our master, Muhammad, the Messenger of God. He asked Ali to extend his hand which the latter did. He then put his hand on Ali's hand, and took the oath of allegiance to him."

Ali greeted the friend and beloved of his master, Muhammad, as cordially as the latter himself would have done, if he were present in person.

The venerable Oways was duly inducted into the army of Medina.

For Ali, the arrival of Oways Qarni in the camp was a rare counterpoint to the grim and ominous scenario of sedition, treason, treachery and rebellion which dominated the Dar-ul-Islam. For a few moments, he forgot the present and was lost in a reverie of the times past; the times of his master, Muhammad. Those were the really "good old days;" those were the truly ideal times. How he wished he could return to those times when, as the right arm of Muhammad, he had defended Islam and his umma from the idolaters. Now in a shocking counterpoint, that umma had challenged his authority, and appeared to be thirsting for his blood. He was roused out of his contemplation of a beautiful and a glorious past by a hideous and a disjointed present.

Ali's initial efforts to eschew war, made from Medina, had failed but he was most anxious to avert the civil war of the Muslims. Therefore, as soon as his soldiers were billeted, he launched his peace offensive, and made a series of new diplomatic overtures to the rebel leaders to come and to negotiate the terms of peace with him rather than appeal to the arbitration of arms. He sent some of the leading companions of the Prophet to plead with Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr not to violate peace but to no avail.

Edward Gibbon

A life of prayer and contemplation had not chilled the martial activity of Ali; but in a mature age, after a long experience of mankind, he still betrayed in his conduct the rashness and indiscretion of youth. In the first days of his reign he neglected to secure either by gifts or fetters, the doubtful allegiance of Talha and Zubeir, two of the most powerful of Arabian chiefs. They escaped from Medina to Mecca, and from thence to Bassora; erected the standard of revolt; and usurped the government of Irak, or Assyria which they had vainly solicited as the reward of their services. The mask of patriotism is allowed to cover the most glaring inconsistencies; and the enemies, perhaps the assassins, of Othman now demanded vengeance for his blood. They were accompanied in their flight by Ayesha, the widow of the Prophet, who cherished to the last hour of her life an implacable hatred against the husband and the posterity of Fatima. (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

In neglecting to secure, either by gifts or fetters, the doubtful allegiance of Talha and Zubayr, Ali was not betraying the rashness and

indiscretion of youth, as Gibbon claims. Ali knew that Talha and Zubayr had treachery in their hearts. Giving presents to them would only be a bribe, and Ali was not the man to bribe anyone for anything.

In Medina, Abdullah ibn Abbas had advised Ali to appoint Talha and Zubayr governors of Basra and Kufa. Judging by their character and subsequent conduct, appointing Talha and Zubayr as governors, would have been a fatal blunder on the part of Ali. If he had done so, he would have to fight, not against one but against three Muawiyas!

As for fetters, again Ali was not the man to arrest anyone for a crime contemplated but not committed yet. When Talha and Zubayr came to him asking for permission to go to Makkah to perform umra, he let them go but told them that it was not to perform a pilgrimage that they were going to Makkah.

As noted above, Ali had been able to muster in Medina not more than seven hundred men. With such a small force, he could not take up the challenge of the rebels. He, therefore, sent Muhammad ibn Jaafer and Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr to Kufa to bring reinforcement from there. The governor of Kufa at this time was Abu Musa al-Ashari, and he opposed them. When reinforcements were late in coming, Ali sent first Abdullah ibn Abbas and Malik ibn Ashter, and then Imam Hasan and Ammar ibn Yasir to Kufa, to recruit soldiers.

Imam Hasan ignored Abu Musa's opposition, went into the great mosque, addressed the Muslims of Kufa in a speech in which he reminded them what their duties and obligations toward God and His Messenger were.

The arrival of Hasan – the darling of Muhammad – in Kufa, created a sensation. His speech was not over yet when the people began to shout: we obey you; we are at your service.

In the meantime, Malik ibn Ashter entered the governor's palace. He drove out Abu Musa's slaves and took possession of the building. Abu Musa fled from Kufa at night, and sought refuge with Muawiya in Damascus.

Imam Hasan, Ammar Yasir, Abdullah ibn Abbas and Malik ibn Ashter returned to Dhi-Qaar with 12,000 warriors of Kufa with them.

Ali's governor in Basra was Uthman ibn Hunaif Ansari, the same companion of the Prophet whom Umar had appointed the Financial Commissioner of Iraq. When he learned that the army of Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr was in the environs of Basra, he sent one of the friends of Ali – Abul Aswad ad-Du'ali – to see them and to find out the reasons why

they came. Abul Aswad called on Ayesha, and the following exchange took place between them.

Abul Aswad: O mother of believers, what is your purpose in coming to Basra with an army?

Ayesha: I came to seek vengeance for the murder of Uthman who was killed in his own house even though he had not committed any sin.

Abul Aswad: Whoever killed Uthman, is not in Basra.

Ayesha: Yes, I know. But to get vengeance, I need the cooperation and the support of the people of Basra.

Abul Aswad: I hope you have not forgotten that the Messenger of God had ordered you to stay at home. In any case, it is not your business to meddle in politics and war. It is most unworthy of a widow of the Prophet to leave his home, and to fight against the Muslims.

Ayesha: Will any Muslim dare to fight against me?

Ayesha believed that if she went into the battlefield at the head of her army, the soldiers of the enemy host, upon seeing her confronting them, would either come over to her side, or would abandon the battle, and desert their master.

Abul Aswad next went to see Talha and Zubayr, and asked them what were their intentions in coming to Basra in battle array.

T & Z: We want vengeance from Ali for the murder of Uthman.

Abul Aswad: Ali did not murder Uthman nor did he have any share in his murder, and youknow it.

T & Z: If he did not, then why is he protecting the murderers?

Abul Aswad: Does this mean that you have broken the pledge of loyalty which you gave to Ali?

T & Z: The pledge was taken from us on the point of sword. It was, therefore, invalid.

Abul Aswad could see that the rebel leaders were obsessed with war, and that further parleys with them were useless. He therefore, returned to Basra, and reported to Uthman ibn Hunaif what Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr had told him.

The rebel leaders had made no secret of their intentions but Uthman ibn Hunaif did not have a strong army, and knew that he could not defend the city against them. Therefore, when they appeared at the city gates, he opened negotiations with them. The two parties agreed that until the arrival of Ali, the rebels would not do anything to disturb the existing arrangement, and Uthman ibn Hunaif would continue to act as governor of Basra.

But hardly two days had passed when the rebel leaders violated the truce. Their army attacked the city at night, and took it by storm, and once it was within its walls, it appeared to go berserk. The soldiers spread into the city and killed 600 Muslims including 40 in the Great Mosque itself.

Talha and Zubayr forced their way into the governor's house where they captured Uthman ibn Hunaif, and killed those who tried to defend him. They wanted to kill him also but he told them that if they killed him, then his brother, Sehl ibn Hunaif, who was the governor of Medina, would kill all their relatives living in that city, in reprisal. They, therefore, had to curb their urge to kill the venerable friend of Muhammad. But they beat him up, plucked out all the hair on his head, his eye brows and his beard, and drove him out of Basra. He managed, somehow, to reach the camp of his master, and staggered into his presence, more dead than alive!

Ali was deeply aggrieved to see Uthman ibn Hunaif in the state in which Talha and Zubayr had sent him. He could hardly recognize him. He tried to comfort the old friend of Muhammad Mustafa with his tears.

The rebel army was now in possession of the city of Basra. It had succeeded in realizing its first aim. Its leaders expelled all friends and supporters of Uthman ibn Hunaif from the city if they did not kill them.

Ali had no choice now but to order his army to advance on Basra. Halting at Zawiya, in the north of Basra, he sent letters once again to each of the rebel leaders suggesting that both sides iron out their disagreements through negotiations rather than fight against each other and kill each other.

The rebel leaders had no desire to acknowledge Ali's letters. Not to leave any doubt in his mind that they had discarded peace as an instrument of their policy, they decided to meet him outside the ramparts of the city.

Sir John Glubb

As the khalif's army approached Basra, the rebels marched out to meet it, led by Zubair and Talha. Not all Basra was with them. Beni Bekr, the tribe once led by the gallant Muthanna, joined the army of Ali. Beni Temeem decided to remain neutral. Ali's army was now slightly stronger. In the days of Ignorance, women mounted in litters on camels, frequently accompanied their tribes into battle, to urge on the warriors. Aisha, "Mother of the Faithful," accompanied the rebel army in her camel-litter." (The Great Arab Conquests, p. 320, 1967)

When the two armies confronted each other, Ali rode out of his line and called Talha and Zubayr to come out and to meet him. Dr. Taha Husain of Egypt says that both generals rode out of their lines in full panoply of war so that the only part of their bodies that could be seen, was their eyes. When Ayesha saw them going, she was alarmed at what might happen to them if they met Ali in battle. But she was informed that Ali was unarmed, and was not, in fact, wearing even an armor, and she was reassured. Ali asked them why they had broken the pledge of loyalty which they had voluntarily given to him, and why did they want to fight against him.

In reply, Talha and Zubayr reeled off the litany of old accusations that he was protecting the murderers of Uthman, and that they were seeking justice for the latter's murder. Ali told them that they knew only too well that he had nothing to do with Uthman's murder or his murderers. He then added: "Since you do not want to listen to reason, I suggest that we try a new wrinkle to resolve this dispute. You will remember that our master, Muhammad, the blessed Messenger of God, had once held a Mubahila (religious meeting) with the Christians of Najran. Let us imitate his example, and hold a Mubahila, and pray as follows:

"O Lord of all Creation! I seek Thy Mercy. Thou art aware of all that I feel or think or do. Nothing is hidden from Thy sight. If I have taken part, directly or indirectly, in the murder of Uthman, or if I have abetted those men who murdered Uthman, or if I was secretly happy when he was killed, show Thy displeasure to me. But if I am innocent of all guilt of complicity in the murder of Uthman, then show Thy displeasure to all those people who allege that I am an accomplice in the crime against Uthman."

Talha and Zubayr did not accept Ali's invitation to hold Mubahila, and openly declared: "We do not consider you worthy of caliphate, and we are in no way less qualified or less deserving to become khalifa than you are." (Tabari, History, vol. III, p. 519).

One thing Talha and Zubayr had done, was to discard the pretense of seeking vengeance for the murder of Uthman; they were going to fight against Ali so they could become khalifas.

Another attempt to save peace had failed but Ali still did not want to see Muslims killing Muslims. He, therefore, called Zubayr who after all was his cousin, to a private meeting, and reminded him of the days when both of them were young comrades-in-arms, and had fought against the enemies of faith under the banner of the Messenger of God. Were they not, he asked Zubayr, such wonderful days, and now, he,

Zubayr, his cousin, wanted to fight against him; how was it possible; how could Zubayr fight against him, his own cousin?

Ali also reminded Zubayr of a prediction of the Apostle. "Do you remember the occasion," he asked Zubayr, "when the Apostle of God told you, in my presence, that someday you would fight against me, and that you would be in error in doing so?" "Oh yes," exclaimed Zubayr, "I remember what the Apostle had said. But I had forgotten the prediction, and now I shall not fight against you." Recollection also came to Zubayr of another prediction of the Messenger of God who had said that his bosom friend, Ammar ibn Yasir, would be killed by a band of wicked men. Now Zubayr suddenly realized that Ammar was in Ali's army.

Zubayr turned the reins of his horse and rode back into his own lines, his face showing signs of inner conflict and deep stress. In reply to the anxious queries of Ayesha and his ambitious and bellicose son, he said that Ali had reminded him of a prediction of the Messenger of God himself, and he had, realizing that he was in error, given him (Ali) another pledge not to fight against him. His fire-eating son said that the real reason for his withdrawal from the battle was not the prediction of the Apostle but the fear of Ali.

Zubayr bridled at this aspersion. He said that he had sworn not to fight against Ali, and added that the choice before him was clear: either he had to lose face among the Arabs for retreating from the battle as a coward, or he had to brace himself for eternal damnation, and he figured that losing face as a coward was the lesser of the two evils.

Zubayr left the battlefield probably with the intention of returning to Medina. He had traveled a few miles when he noticed that he was being shadowed by a stranger. This stranger was a man of Basra, one Amr bin Jermoz. Though Zubayr's suspicions were roused, he kept riding until he reached a village. There he dismounted to wash himself, to say his prayers and to rest. But he had come to the journey's end. When he was saying his prayers, Amr bin Jermoz attacked him and killed him.

Zubayr was eliminated from the equation but Talha and Ayesha were determined to fight even without him. Ali, however, still hesitated to fight, and decided to make one more attempt to rescue peace. He sent a young man, one Muslim ibn Abdullah who was noted for his piety, with a copy of the Qur'an, to appeal to the enemy to submit the dispute to the Judgment of God, and to uphold peace in the name of the sanctity of Muslim blood.

Standing in front of the enemy host at close range, Muslim ibn Abdullah opened the Qur'an, and said: "I will read a passage from the Book of

God so that you will know what are His commandments and Prohibitions." His speech, however, was interrupted by the archers of the enemy who shot arrows at the copy of the Qur'an he was reading. While he was trying to protect the copy of the Qur'an, one of the slaves of Ayesha crept up toward him, attacked him and killed him.

The body of Muslim ibn Abdullah was brought before Ali, and was placed on the ground. Ali was lamenting his death when another body, that of one of his warriors who was shot and killed with arrows by the army of Basra, was brought before him. He tried to remove the arrows from the corpse but he had not removed many when more bodies of his soldiers, riddled with arrows, arrived and were stacked before him in full view of the two armies. The rebels were practicing archery at Ali's army.

Tabari says in his History, (vol. III, p. 522) that when Ali saw these bodies in front of him, he said:

"Now it is lawful to fight against them."

Then Ali lifted his hands toward heaven, and prayed:

"O Lord! Be Thou a Witness that I have left nothing undone to preserve peace among Muslims. Now there is no choice left for me but to allow my army to defend itself from unprovoked attacks. We are Thy humble slaves. Bestow Thy Grace and Thy Mercy upon us. Grant us victory over the enemy but if it is Thy pleasure to grant it to him, then grant us the crown of martyrdom."

Ali concluded his prayer, and then turning toward his troops, addressed them thus just before giving them the signal to fight:

"O Muslims! do not be the first to strike at your adversary; let your adversary be the first to strike at you. Once he does, then you have to defend yourselves. If God gives you victory over your enemies, then remember that they are also Muslims. Therefore, do not kill the wounded among them. If they run from the field, do not pursue them, and let them save their lives. If you capture prisoners, do not kill them. Do not mutilate the dead, and do not rob them of their armor or weapons or other valuables which you may find on their persons. Do not plunder their camp, and do not molest their women even if they use foul and abusive language against you or your leaders. But above all things, do not be unmindful, at any time, of the presence of your Creator in your life. You are in His sight every moment."

The two armies then charged at each other. The rebels had already lost Zubayr, one of their two generals, through desertion. The other general, Talha, was also destined to meet a fate similar to Zubayr's. Abul Fida,

the historian, says that Marwan asked his slave to cover him so that he would not be seen. When the slave covered him, he strung an arrow to his bow, aimed it at Talha, and said to his slave:

"I saw this man (Talha) during the days when Uthman was besieged in his house. He was inciting and urging the crowd to enter the house, and to kill him. But today he wants vengeance for his blood. How touching! He truly loved Uthman. Here, I will give him a reward for that love. He richly deserves a reward. After all, such love must not go unrewarded."

Marwan released the arrow. It was a fatal shot that caught Talha in the thigh, and he limped to his death in the rear of the army.

Ibn Saad

In the battle of the Camel, Talha was on his horse beside Ayesha when Marwan shot an arrow at him which transfixed his leg. Then Marwan said: "By God, now I will not have to search for the man who murdered Uthman." (Tabaqat, vol. III, p. 223)

Hakim

Ibrahim ibn Muhammad ibn Talha said that Marwan bin al-Hakam killed his grandfather (Talha) with an arrow in the battle of the Camel. Mustadrak)

Sir John Glubb

Zubair was a first cousin of the Prophet. His mother had been the sister of Mohammed's father. Zubair and Ali had known one another and worked together all their lives. When they now met between the lines of their respective armies, Ali asked Zubair if he remembered this and that occasion when they had both been young, and when both were filled with passionate religious zeal and personal devotion to Mohammed; how the Apostle of God had said this and Ali or Zubair had said that. What wonderful times those had been. Zubair was moved to tears and swore that he would never oppose Ali with force. Ali had the reputation of being a persuasive speaker.

When the fighting was joined, Zubair, in compliance with his oath, withdrew from the battlefield. Wandering in a desert valley, a little way from the battle-field, he was apparently encountered and killed by some passing straggler. Thus futilely and ignominiously died one of the great early heroes of Islam. Meanwhile, Talha had been wounded by an arrow and was carried back to Basra where he died soon after. (The Great Arab Conquests, p. 320, 1967)

Zubayr and Talha perished for the most dubious of causes. It appears that they were aware that the cause for which they were going to fight, was not theirs, and it was not just. Both of them had been among the

leading heroes of the early days of Islam but in the battle of Basra, their heroism abandoned them. They showed no heroism, and they died like sheep. The only explanation for this can be that their morale had collapsed, and they were defeated even before the battle began. Theirs was a moral defeat.

Actually, Talha and Zubayr had walked into an impasse. At one time, they were very eager to get rid of Uthman. They cast the die and they lost. After the death of Uthman, sojourn in Medina would, in fact, be very perilous for them. They could find no exit from the impasse except by shouting that they were seeking vengeance for the blood of Uthman. Arresting the murderer(s) of Uthman was the duty of the lawfully constituted authority which was existing, and which had declared that it was going to investigate the case. But this is precisely what Talha and Zubayr were afraid of. They did not want any investigation. Their only chance of saving their own necks was to throw the state into turmoil, and to keep it in turmoil. In this attempt they were successful. They "succeeded" in the sense that they did not allow Ali to investigate the murder of Uthman, and instead, they compelled him to grapple with their rebellion.

It's amazing that Talha and Zubayr, early converts to Islam and companions of the Prophet that they were, could break their solemn pledge so casually as they did. If they really believed that Ali was implicated in the murder of Uthman, they ought to have said so in the Prophet's Mosque in the assembly of all Muhajireen and Ansar instead of taking the oath of loyalty to him. But they did not, and they took the oath of loyalty. As long as they had hope that Ali would appoint them governors, they kept quiet. But as soon as they lost that hope, they broke their pledge, and rose in rebellion. A rebellion was the only way in which they could prevent Ali from investigating the murder of Uthman.

If Talha and Zubayr had been sincere in seeking vengeance for the murder of Uthman, there is one thing they could have done. They could have told Ali that they were going to set a deadline for him to investigate the case of Uthman, and he had to apprehend the criminals before that deadline. But they didn't set such a deadline; instead, they rose in rebellion behind the screen of seeking vengeance for the murder of Uthman.

Some historians say that Ali lamented the death of both Zubayr and Talha. If he did, recollection must have come to him of the glorious beginning and the inglorious end of these two heroes of primitive Islam. Talha and Zubayr paid a rather high price for their unprincipled ambition, and as the modern Arabic expression goes, they "choked on their own frustration."

With Talha and Zubayr thus eliminated, the camel on which Ayesha rode, became the rallying point of the army of Basra. Her soldiers fought fiercely and with determined bravery, and they made themselves a living rampart around her camel. One warrior held its reins in his hand. Ali's famous captain, Malik ibn Ashter, cut his arm at the elbow. Immediately, another warrior took the place of the first, and held the reins of the camel in his hand. Malik cut his arm also. A third champion stepped in, and he too lost his arm. This went on until the severed arms were piled high in front of the camel.

All around Ayesha's camel, men were attacking each other, and were dying. Ayesha, sitting in the litter on top of the camel, was urging her warriors to defend her, and to attack and kill the enemy who had killed their innocent khalifa, Uthman. Each time, they heard her voice, they were inspired to make a greater effort. They were striking deadly blows at the enemy not only to defend the Mother of the Faithful but also to avenge the death of Uthman.

Malik was still playing his little game of cutting the arms of all those men who held the reins of Ayesha's camel. Presently he spotted Abdullah bin Zubayr, the fire-eater of the Makkan army, and the darling of Ayesha, brandishing his sword. He was the "prime mover" of the battle of Basra in which thousands of Muslims were killed. If it were not for his incendiaries, the battle of Basra might never have been fought.

Malik forgot Ayesha's camel, and lunged viciously at Abdullah bin Zubayr, knocking him down on the ground. As he pointed his sword toward his throat, an anguished cry escaped from Ayesha who thought that he (Malik) was going to kill him (her nephew). In panic, she screamed: "O save Abdullah or else Malik will kill him."

But who was there in the rebel army who could save Ayesha's nephew from Malik? Whoever came close to save him, was himself killed. There was only one man who could save Abdullah, and that was Malik himself. When he heard Ayesha's agonized cry, he said to Abdullah: "I am tempted to run you through with my sword but I give you your life because of your kinship with the Apostle of God."

Malik spared the life of Abdullah bin Zubayr more in contempt than in pity. The latter stood up from the dust, and unnerved as he was by this brush with death, rapidly put himself out of the range of Malik's sword, with the resolution of never to be caught by him again.

Malik returned to the sport of severing the arms of the rebels. But they were not dismayed by the fear of losing their arms to him. Ayesha was

encouraging them as she kept shouting: "Be blessed, my sons! glory to you for defending your mother so gallantly."

Eventually Malik got tired of cutting the arms of men, and he decided to put an end to the game which had lasted much too long. He planted his feet at the bodies of the dead, aimed a blow of his irresistible sword, and killed Ayesha's camel.

The camel fell bespattering all around it with its blood, and Ayesha's howdah fell to the ground with it. But she was not hurt. Ali immediately sent Ayesha's brother, Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr, and Ammar ibn Yasir, to put the howdah on the ground, and told him to escort his sister to the house of the widow of a certain noble of Basra.

Ayesha's camel was the visible emblem for which the army of Basra was fighting. When it was killed, the "emblem" disappeared. Suddenly the army of Basra had nothing for which to fight, and it began to come apart – visibly. Everyone in it began to flee every which way. In their flight, the soldiers forgot even Ayesha for whom they were fighting so heroically only a little earlier. Soon nothing was left on the battlefield except the dead and the wounded. Since Ali had forbidden his army to pursue the fugitives, most of the rebels were able to escape, and the battle was practically over.

Ali promulgated once again the orders he had issued before the battle that the dead were not to be robbed or mutilated; the enemy camp was not to be plundered; and those combatants who had surrendered, were not to be killed. He maintained that his own army must set an example of gentleness, restraint, decency and uprightness as the basic values underpinning a genuinely Islamic military organization.

Sir John Glubb

The battle of the Camel was fought in December 656. As soon as the enemy withdrew, Ali gave orders that there should be no pursuit and that killing should immediately cease. When Ali entered Basra, he endeavored to conciliate all parties. The defeated army was treated with generosity. Ali urged that bygones be bygones, for he was of a mild and generous, perhaps an easy-going nature and wished to reunite the empire rather than revenge himself upon his enemies." (The Great Arab Conquests, p. 322, 1963)

Ali was generous, and he wanted to reunite the empire and the umma (people) of his master, Muhammad; but he was not "easy-going" as Sir John Glubb imagines. The reason he did not chastise the rebels was that he had an extreme hatred of bloodshed in general, and of intra-Muslim bloodshed in particular.

He also forbore from destroying the rebel city of Basra for the same reason, viz., his belief in the sanctity of the Muslim blood. Incidentally, no one else among his contemporaries shared this belief with him. They were not squeamish like him about shedding Muslim blood; they shed it, and torrents of it.

Ayesha interceded with Ali for her nephew and adopted son, Abdullah bin Zubayr, and begged him to pardon him. Ali said: "Pardon Abdullah bin Zubayr alone? There is pardon for everyone."

Ali released not only Abdullah bin Zubayr but also such unconscionable enemies as Marwan bin al-Hakam, Walid bin Aqaba, Abdullah bin Aamir, and all the other Umayyads.

Nowhere in the entire history of the world has a conqueror treated his defeated enemy as generously as Ali, before or since. In granting amnesty to the rebels, he was, once again, imitating his late friend and master, Muhammad, the blessed Apostle of God, who had also pardoned the polytheists of Makkah, among them his most rabid enemies, when he conquered that city. Ali walked in the footsteps of Muhammad, and he lived in imitation of his sainted life.

A few days later, Ayesha was ready to travel. Upon her request, Ali sent her to Makkah. Her brother, Muhammad, went with her. In Makkah, she performed Umra, and then she went to Medina.

Ayesha has the reputation of being highly knowledgeable in matters of religion, and she was also a muhadittha, i.e., a narrator of the traditions of the Prophet. Being so knowledgeable, is it possible that she did not know that she had no right to seek vengeance for Uthman's blood? Vengeance-seeking is the business of the injured party, and imposing penalty upon the offender(s) is the duty of the government. Ayesha was neither related to Uthman in any way nor she was a representative of the government of the Muslims. And yet she challenged the lawful government in the name of vengeance, and pushed an immense number of Muslims into the flames of war. Her obsession with war made thousands of children orphans, and thousands of women widows.

A certain woman, one Umm Aufa al-Abdiyya, once asked Ayesha: "O mother of believers, what is your opinion about a woman who kills her own child?" Ayesha said that such a woman would be thrown into hell. Umm Aufa further asked: "What will happen to a woman who killed more than 20,000 of her children at one time and one place?" Ayesha was incensed at the insinuation, and yelled scram at Umm Aufa. (Iqd-ul-Farid, vol. III, p. 108).

Some members of Ayesha's own family wished she had never led armies and fought battles. On one occasion, she sent a messenger to her nephew, Ibn Abil-Ateeq, asking him to send his mule to her for riding. When her nephew received the message, he said to the messenger:

"Tell the mother of believers that by God, we have not washed the stains of the blood shed in the battle of the camel yet. Does she now want to start a battle of the mule?" (Baladhuri in Ansab al-Ashraf, vol. I, page 431)

Ibn Abil Ateeq's remark was prompted in jest. But in 669 the day actually came when Ayesha rode a mule in another "campaign." When the coffin of Imam Hasan was brought to the mausoleum of his grandfather, Muhammad Mustafa, for burial, Marwan bin al-Hakam and other members of the Banu Ummaya appeared on the scene, in battledores. They were going to prevent the Banu Hashim from burying Imam Hasan beside his grandfather. The Umayyads were not alone; Ayesha, the mother of believers, came with them, riding a mule!

Ayesha may have lost the battle in Basra but she "won" the "battle" in Medina. Hasan could not be buried with his grandfather because of her and Umayyad opposition, and he was buried in the cemetery of Jannat-ul-Baqi.

There is no way to rationalize the roles Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr played after the death of Uthman. The fact that they were famous personalities in the history of the Muslims, does not change or affect the roles they played. An error does not become less reprehensible because some important person committed it. An error remains an error regardless of who committed it.

The wives of the Prophet were especially expected to be discreet in everything they said or did. After all, they had to be models before the umma of exemplary deportment and decorum. A lapse from excellence may be condoned in the wives of the commoners but not in them. Addressing them, Qur'an says:

O consorts of the Prophet! If any of you were guilty of evident unseemly conduct, the punishment would be doubled to her, and that is easy for God. (Chapter 33; verse 30)

Some historians have made an attempt to cushion the trauma of these events for the future generations, by claiming that the deeds of the "Companions of the Camel" were merely a minor "error of judgment." Tens of thousands of Muslims perished in the battle of Basra for no reason other than a minor error of judgment on the part of the "Companions of the Camel!"

Reference has already been made, in an earlier chapter, to the mysterious and mythical "Abdullah bin Saba," who was, according to many Sunni historians, the real "catalyst" in the assassination of Uthman. The same historians found it necessary to explain some other perplexing and uncomfortable events by "recycling" him. This is perhaps the earliest extant example in history of recycling.

According to these historians, Abdullah bin Saba and his followers looked at peace as their nemesis. They were convinced that if Ali's overtures for peace were successful, then they would become its first casualties. Therefore, the only guarantee that they could find for their own safety, was in the civil war of the Muslims.

It was with this understanding, so say the Sunni historians, that Abdullah bin Saba and his party, attacked at night, the two armies, simultaneously. In the darkness, neither side could see or recognize the real agents provocateurs, and each side was convinced that the other had started the battle.

The invention of Abdullah bin Saba was dictated by the pragmatic necessity for the window-dressing of some embarrassing passages in history. An ingenious invention indeed but unfortunately for the window-dressers of history, and for the apologists of the "Companions of the Camel," Abdullah bin Saba does not answer all the questions on their conduct. For example, was it Abdullah bin Saba who violated the truce with Uthman ibn Hunaif, and who attacked Basra at night, captured it, seized its treasury, and killed more than 600 Muslims in the city? And was it Abdullah ibn Saba who threatened to kill Uthman ibn Hunaif, brutalized him, drove him out of his home, and banished him from Basra?

And how is it that when Ali sent Abdullah ibn Muslim with a copy of Qur'an to warn the rebels that they would merit the displeasure of God if they chose war in preference to peace, they shot arrows at the Book, and they killed him (Abdullah ibn Muslim, the carrier of Qur'an)? Was it Abdullah bin Saba who killed him?

And who was it who was practicing archery at Ali's army? The archers in the rebel army had killed more than twenty young men in his army before he allowed them to fight. Were these archers killing Ali's soldiers without the knowledge of Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr? If they were, did the "triumvirs" do anything to restrain them?

Ayesha lived for many years after the battle of Basra but she never referred to Abdullah bin Saba and his role as the catalyst of war. She often said that she wished that she had died long before that battle in which

many thousands of Muslims were killed. If Abdullah bin Saba had been a historical figure, she would have scourged him for the carnage in the battle of Basra. Abdullah bin Saba was created a long time after the battle of Basra, and the death of Ayesha.

If Abdullah bin Saba had been a historical character, he would have been, very much, in the center of the events and the news of the times, after playing such an "outstanding" role in the early history of Islam. Was he not present in the battles of Siffin and Nehrwan? Didn't he trigger those two battles also after he had had such success in Basra? And didn't Muawiya and the Kharjis also become victims of his intrigues? Whatever happened to such an important, if sinister, character in the history of the Muslims?

Abdullah bin Saba was an entirely synthetic and an ad hoc character. He was designed especially by the admirers and partisans of some important personages in the early history of the Muslims. Their aim was to protect the reputation, and also, if possible, to mask the identity, of these personages. These latter were actually responsible, first, for the assassination of Uthman, the third khalifa; and then, for the outbreak of the Second Civil War in Islam – the battle of Basra or the battle of the Camel. They hoped that the reputation of the personages in question would become safe from the judgment of history if they could foist the blame for these events upon Abdullah bin Saba.

Abdullah bin Saba, it appears, was a most remarkable man in the history of the Muslims. He succeeded, first, in dragging to Basra, such "unwilling" leaders as Ayesha, and such "peace-loving" generals as Talha, Zubayr, Abdullah bin Zubayr, and Marwan, with their whole army, all the way across the vast Arabian desert, and then, in coaxing them to launch an attack on Ali's army. Muslims were not only eager to obey him; they were also eager to die for him, and many did, in the battle of Basra. He must have been highly charismatic. One cannot help admiring his gumption and his amazing powers.

But notwithstanding all his charisma, and his abilities and capacities, Abdullah bin Saba appears to have been a shy man. This is proven by the fact that he was "allergic" to publicity. Immediately after the battle of Basra, he plunged into obscurity, and never surfaced again. He perhaps died unsung and un-mourned. It is even possible that the "midwives" who were present at his birth, were also present at his "funeral," and they were of the opinion that his mission was accomplished, and that they could give him a burial, never to exhume him again.

The battle of Basra or the battle of the Camel is one of the greatest tragedies in the history of Islam. It struck the death blow to the unity of the Muslim umma, and Islam never recovered from its trauma. Many Muslim historians tell the story of the battle of Basra but when doing so they try to soft-pedal some vital issues, and they try to obfuscate the reader. Their reason for doing so is that the rebel leaders in the battle of Basra, were "Companions" of the Prophet, and therefore, they must be exonerated of all guilt or crime. After all, their "special status," they say, entitles them to such treatment.

But the loyalty of a historian must be to truth, and not to persons, even if they are "Companions" of the Prophet. The duty of a historian is to state facts. He may analyze facts, interpret them, and establish generalizations resting on them but he must never tamper with them. He must enable the reader to judge for himself the merits of a companion of the Prophet on the basis of his "track record" instead of trying to put up a smoke-screen of slick words to hide the "warts" on his face. The failure of a historian to do this means that he is suppressing Truth which is the same thing as broadcasting Falsehood!

If the battle of Basra had not been fought, then the battles of Siffin and Nehrwan also would not have been fought. The seeds of dissension in Islam were sown and they burgeoned in the battle of Basra. If Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr had not challenged the lawful sovereign of the Muslims, the doors of schism in Islam would never have been opened.

The rebel leaders were free agents. Their choice was determined by their own personal blend of ambition, hatred, guilt and jealousy. It was not principle that prompted them but chagrin, self-interest and the lust for power posing as altruism. Their bellicosity proved counter-productive not only for the Muslims but also for themselves.

Did Muslim historians ever pause to reflect what might have happened if the "triumvirs" of Basra had been victorious in their battle against Ali? Two things would have happened in the event of their victory, viz., (1) seething with hatred as they were, they would have done in A.D. 656 in Basra what Yazid the son of Muawiya did in A.D. 680 in Kerbala, i.e., they would have massacred all members of the family of Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God; and (2) after their victory over Ali, they would have confronted Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan, the governor of Syria, in a new alignment of forces.

In this new alignment, Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr would have been on one side, and Muawiya and Amr bin Aas, on the other. The Muslim world would have been divided into these two hostile camps, and in the

following struggle for hegemony, the two sides would have decimated each other.

It should be borne in mind by the reader that none of the antagonists in this new and theoretical equation, was "handicapped" such as Ali was, by his humanity and restraint, and also by his extreme aversion to bloodshed. Therefore, war between them would have been savage and ruthless, and untrammeled by any "inhibitions" for the sanctity of the Muslim blood. The Muslim world would have been deluged in blood leaving a vast power vacuum. Into this vacuum would have marched the emperor of the Byzantines with his army, and would have snuffed the light of Islam out!

The "triumvirs" had deliberately and recklessly courted war that could escalate into a major catastrophe for the Muslim umma. From this possible catastrophe, it was the skill, the vision, the humanity and the statesmanship of Ali that saved the umma of Muhammad. May God bless him and all other members of the Ahlul-Bayt of Muhammad.

It is also claimed by some historians that the "Companions of the Camel" regretted what they had done, and they had sincerely "repented;" therefore, they are innocent of all guilt. It is entirely possible that the Companions of the Camel needed catharsis – the ritual of "repentance"– to purge them of their sense of guilt. But no proof of their "repentance" has come down to us. Ali had offered redemption to them, not once but repeatedly, and they had turned it down.

If the Companions of the Camel repented, then it is for God alone to accept their repentance. God will accept their repentance if they were sincere. But acceptance by God of their repentance will not become known to us until the Day of Judgment. The historian's job, as stated earlier, is only to isolate Truth from the mass of falsehood in which it may be hidden, and then to state it, with clarity and precision. He should interpret facts but he must not suppress them or invent them or distort them out of his fear lest they reflect an unflattering image of his favorite character(s) in the history of Islam.

After the battle, Ali said prayers for the dead of the two armies, and ordered his men to bury all the corpses lying on the battle-field. His orders to them were to show respect to the dead Muslims whether they were friends or foes. It was only when all dead Muslims were given a burial, that he could turn his attention to other matters.

Ali Enters Basra

The historian, Masudi, "the Herodotus of the Arabs," has appended, in his book, The Golden Meadows, the following vignette of Ali's army

when it was entering Basra. It is also a sidelight on his military organization, and the place of the Ansar in it.

A distinguished citizen of Basra told me that when he heard that the conquering army was approaching the main gate of the city, he climbed on top of the ramparts to see it, and this is what he saw:

There were many formations of cavalry and infantry in the army of Medina though the army itself was rather small. Marching at the head of a contingent of cavalry, the first one that entered Basra, was an elderly horseman. A sword was hanging by his side, and he was carrying the standard of the unit he was leading. I inquired from the people around me who he was and they told me that he was Abu Ayub Ansari, the friend and one-time host in Medina, of Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God. His contingent of 1000 cavaliers comprised the warriors of the Ansar.

Behind them, there was another rider. He was wearing a pale yellow turban and a white robe. He carried a bow on his right shoulder, and the standard of his unit was in his left hand. He too rode at the head of 1000 cavaliers, and they too were the Ansar. He was, I learned, Khuzaima ibn Thabit Ansari.

The third officer was riding a powerful bay. He wore a white turban, carried a sword and a bow, and led a contingent of 1000 horsemen. He was Abu Qatada ibn Rabi'i Ansari.

The fourth officer rode a beautiful white charger. His dress was white and his turban was black. He appeared to be a man of great dignity and distinction, and he inspired respect and reverence among all beholders. He was very old but he had a military bearing. He was reading Qur'an as he rode toward the city. A sword was suspended by his side, and a bow hung from his right shoulder. Behind him there were 1000 horsemen. They were mostly elderly men, and they all carried long spears in their hands. When I inquired who he was, I was told that he was Ammar ibn Yasir, the friend and beloved of Muhammad Mustafa and Ali ibn Abi Talib. Riding behind him were both the Muhajireen and the Ansar, and many of them were the veterans of Badr.

My eye was next caught by a most handsome man. He was riding a spirited roan. His dress was white and his turban was black. He was Abdullah ibn Abbas, the first cousin of Muhammad Mustafa and Ali ibn Abi Talib. With him were his brothers and his nephews.

By this time, most of the cavalry had entered Basra, and it appeared to me that the last two detachments were approaching the city gate. Presently, the first of them came up. At its head rode a horseman of

powerful build. He was in full battle-dress, and he struck terror into the hearts of all those who saw him. He was carrying a black banner in his right hand, and a spear in his left. He appeared to be the standard-bearer of the army or some other high-ranking officer. My guess was right. He was Malik ibn Ashter, the Chief of Staff of the army of Medina, and the greatest swordsman that the Arabs ever produced. No adversary who ever faced him, escaped him. He led four thousand warriors of both cavalry and infantry.

The last man to pass in review was a cavalier who was radiant like the sun. On his right and left, there were two young men, each radiant like the full moon. All three were dressed in black. The proud and prancing horses they were riding, were also black. Another young man carrying a lance, rode ahead of them. The man in the center, I learned, was the general of this army - Ali ibn Abi Talib. The two young men on his right and left, were his sons, Hasan and Husain - the apples of the eyes of Muhammad, the Apostle of God. The young man who was riding ahead of them, was also his son, Muhammad ibn Hanafiyyah.

Behind them, there were several other formations of men in arms. They were bringing up the rear-guard of the army. Among them were the sons of Jaafer Tayyar, the sons of Aqeel ibn Abi Talib, and the other young men of Banu Hashim. They were the last horsemen to enter Basra.

Ali dismounted from his horse at the gate of the great Mosque of Basra. He went into the mosque, offered his prayers, and thanked God for His bounties, and for the gift of victory.

The citizens of Basra had gathered in the court of the mosque awaiting Ali's arrival. Presently he came out of the mosque to address them. He reproved them for their mindless conduct throughout the campaign, and said to them:

"You were the followers of a beast. When it bellowed you obeyed it; when it was killed, you all fled, and were scattered."

Then Ali took the pledge of loyalty from the citizens of Basra. He advised them to obey God and His Messenger at all times, and never again to act like dumb sheep.

From the Mosque, Ali went to the treasury. The treasury had been plundered. He ordered all stolen property to be returned to the treasury immediately. When he paid a second visit to the treasury a little later, he noticed pieces of gold and silver piled high on the ground. He looked at these little hills of gold and silver, and said: "Try to tempt someone else." He then ordered the treasurer to distribute everything to the troops. The treasurer distributed everything, and nothing was left in the treasury.

For some mysterious reason, Ali and the Ansar were en rapport from the beginning. And for reasons just as mysterious, the Ansar could never cotton to the Quraysh. There was little, if any, cordiality between the Quraysh and the Ansar. It was not until Ali became caliph that the Ansar could play, for the first time since the death of their friend, Muhammad, a meaningful role in the government of the Muslims. Ali appointed them to the highest positions in the empire – both as generals in the army and as governors of the provinces. In both spheres, the Ansar distinguished themselves by their ability and integrity.

Ali offset the "provincial" character of the caliphate by "de-Qurayshisizing" the administration when he restored the rights of the Ansar to them. In his government, a man did not have to be a Qurayshi to rise to high position. Any man – whether or not he was a Qurayshi - could rise to the highest positions during Ali's caliphate, if he could present two "credentials" – character and ability.

Chapter 62

The Change of Capital from Medina to Kufa

IN RAJAB OF 36 A.H. (JANUARY 657) ALI decided to transfer the headquarters of his government from Medina in Hijaz to Kufa in Iraq. When law and order had been restored in Basra, he appointed Abdullah ibn Abbas as its new governor, and then left for Kufa which became, thenceforth, the new capital of Islam.

On Rajab 12 of 36 A.H., Ali arrived at the gates of Kufa. The nobles of the city came out to greet him and to congratulate him on his victory. Entering the city, Ali first went into the Great Mosque, offered the prayer of thanksgiving to God for victory, and then delivered a speech in which he thanked the people of Kufa for their support, and commended them for their gallant performance in the battle of Basra.

The nobles of Kufa requested Ali to stay at the governor's palace but he did not agree. Instead, he chose an unpretentious house for his residence.

Historians have tried to find out the reasons why Ali changed the capital from Medina to Kufa. Professors Sayed Abdul Qadir and Muhammad Shuja-ud-Din, write in their book, The History of Islam, (published in Lahore, Pakistan):

Seven months after taking charge of the government, Ali made Kufa his new capital. Following were some of the reasons that prompted this change:

1. The battle of Basra or the battle of the Camel was fought and was won with the aid of the people of Kufa. Ali made Kufa his capital, partly in recognition of this service by them.

2. Ali was anxious to save Medina from the havoc of civil strife like the one which had ended in the murder of Uthman. He did not want Medina to become the locale of political disturbances at any time, and he wanted to save the City of the Prophet from destruction or desecration in the possible wars of the future.

3. Kufa had a more central position in the empire. Administrative facility of the vast and sprawling territories dictated this change.

4. It was easier for Ali to watch the movements of Muawiya from Kufa than from Medina." (The History of Islam)

Kh. Muhammad Latif Ansari of Pakistan, a contemporary historian, has pointed out in his History of Islam, that just as Abu Jahl and Abu Sufyan were responsible for the migration of Muhammad from Makkah to Medina, so was the latter's son, Muawiya, responsible for Ali's migration from Medina to Kufa. He says that civil wars had begun but theaters of war were too distant from Medina. Ali, therefore, changed the capital for strategic reasons, and this supports his claim that it was the rebellion of Muawiya, the governor of Syria, which was responsible for his (Ali's) migration from Hijaz to Iraq.

Actually, there were both pragmatic and idealistic reasons why Ali changed the capital. Some of them were as follows:

(1). When Ali ascended the throne of khilafat, the important urban centers of the empire were Damascus in Syria, Makkah and Medina in Hijaz, and Basra and Kufa in Iraq.

Damascus was held by Muawiya, and was, therefore, the center of opposition to Ali. Of the other four cities, Makkah, at first, was in the hands of the rebel leaders - Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr. In Makkah, they raised a volunteer army of 3000 warriors. They left Makkah with their army for Basra, and occupied that city. Many of those Makkans who did not go to Basra with the rebel army, gave it their material support. Thus Ali could count Makkah out.

Medina had a record hardly any better. As noted before, when Uthman was killed, Medina was at the mercy of the rebels. The Muhajireen and the Ansar realized that there was no one in all Dar-ul-Islam who could save the city from being plundered, the people from being massacred, and the government from breaking down, except Ali. They, therefore, appealed to him to take charge of the government.

Ali told the Muhajireen and the Ansar that he would accept their offer if they gave him a pledge to obey his orders both in peace and in war. They gave him their pledge to obey him, and he accepted their offer.

But only a few days had passed when rebellion reared its head in Makkah against the caliphal authority. Ali went into the Mosque, and called upon the Muhajireen and the Ansar to rise in defense of the central government. Their only response was silence. Ali reminded them of the pledge they had given to him to obey him and they still did not respond. All his appeals and reminders seemed to fall on deaf ears.

It was only after many weeks of appeals and a great effort that Ali could enlist the support of seven hundred volunteers in Medina. This was all that Medina would do for him. He left Medina with these volunteers – never to return.

Basra, the fourth city, had acknowledged Ali's authority, and he had appointed Uthman ibn Hunaif Ansari its new governor. But before Ali arrived in Iraq, the "triumvirate" of Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr had already captured Basra. Uthman ibn Hunaif barely managed to escape from Basra with his life.

Now the "choice" of Ali was narrowed down to one city – Kufa. Ali sent Imam Hasan and Ammar ibn Yasir to Kufa to bring reinforcements for him. Kufa sent 12,000 warriors to Basra, and it were these warriors who fought in the battle of the Camel, and defeated the "triumvirate" of Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr.

Makkah, Medina and Basra had left Ali in no illusions about what they would do in an emergency. But the citizens of Kufa had sent reinforcements to him at a most critical moment in his career. He could clearly see that if there was war with Muawiya, he had only the army of Kufa to depend upon. It was, therefore, the logic of events that influenced Ali's decision to make Kufa the capital of the empire.

The people of Medina, it appears, had only a tepid interest in the events taking place around them. When Ali declared that he would transfer the governmental headquarters to Kufa, no one among them protested against this decision. They did not react to such a momentous change as if they couldn't care less if their city was or was not the capital of Islam!

(2). Medina was the cradle of Islamic culture and civilization. The truly Islamic mode of life could be seen at its best only in Medina. The foreign wars and conquests had brought people of many different cultures in the dominion of Islam. If Medina were also to remain the political and administrative capital of the empire, as it was the spiritual capital, then the alien people, with their alien cultures and un-Islamic background, would have come to live in it. They would have brought their own mores, customs, manners, traditions and religious practices with them. By doing so, they would have either dominated the pure Islamic culture or they would have diluted it. At any rate, pristine Islam would have been exposed at all times to alien influences.

Joel Carmichael

Islam collided with the immense intellectual entity of Christianity, heavy with the thought of Greece and Rome. Christian thinking included

not merely the whole of Hellenistic thought, but also the ideas current in Persia and elsewhere throughout the ancient East. Thus an immense variety of traditions and ideas, a central complex of ideas and institutions, all more or less predigested by Christianity, was transplanted en masse to the new universe of Islam. (The Shaping of the Arabs, New York, p.194, 1967)

But Ali shifted the political center of Islam away from Medina, and thus saved the Islamic way of life in its very cradle. He saved Makkah and Medina from the cultural hegemony of the Christians, the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans and the Magians. He maintained the character of these two cities as it was in the time of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, himself.

(3). In most cases, the capital of a nation also becomes the capital of vice, sin, crimes and other evils. Babylon, ancient Rome and Byzantium, the capitals of great empires, were also the fleshpots of their times. Men and women of the conquered nations visit the great imperial cities, and they bring their vices with them. Uncontrolled growth, over-crowding, and the facileness of sprawling metropolitan centers breed evils of all kinds. Many modern capitals are not unworthy runners-up to Babylon and ancient Rome.

Medina was the fountainhead of the teachings of Qur'an, and it also had the mausoleum of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, in it. Muhammad was the Interpreter of the Last Message of God to mankind, and his duty was to invite mankind to live pure, noble and chaste lives. Islam was the builder of character, par excellence, and there was no better example of chaste and sanctified life than the life of its Bringer. If Medina had become like other imperial capitals of the past, then Islam's invitation to the rest of mankind would have become a mockery. Ali saved the sanctity of Medina, and the ethos of Islam's missionary program by separating the spiritual (or religious) and the political centers of the empire.

Ali was truly prophetic in his vision. He saved Medina from degenerating into a prototype of Damascus or Baghdad or Cordova. The panoply of civilization rapidly developed in Syria, sustained and fed by the rapidly expanding empire. The wealth of the conquered nations poured into Damascus (and later, into Baghdad and other cities). With wealth, came its concomitant – luxury – and the ambition of the ruling classes to cultivate and patronize the "fine arts." Greek and Persian singing and dancing girls came into the metropolitan centers of the empire of the Arabs in a steady stream.

Those readers who wish to see a vignette of the heyday of the Umayyad and Abbasi empires, can do so in many books, among them the twenty volumes of Kitab al-Aghani (The Book of Songs) by Abul-Faraj Isfahani, or in another book called The Ring of the Dove by Imam ibn Hazm of Spain, both faithful mirrors of their times.

A. J. Arberry

The empire continued to increase in wealth, as trade went farther and farther afield; the wealth was concentrated in the hands of the grasping few, who relished an affluence which would have amazed their Bedouin forebears. Gorgeous palaces and lavishly - appointed mansions adorned the capital Baghdad and the provincial centers, Bokhara, Samarkand, Balkh, Shiraz, Damascus, Aleppo, Jerusalem, Cairo, Tripoli, Tunis, Fez, Palermo, Cordova. The dolce vita of the gilded aristocracy is brilliantly portrayed, as it was lived in Andalusia on the eve of the Norman conquest of England, in The Ring of the Dove, a highly sophisticated manual of courtly love composed by an eminent theologian, Ibn Hazm. Slave boys and singing girls, amenities unknown to the ancient Arabs, provided Muslim gentlemen with novel pleasures and the poets with a new vocabulary. Wine was forbidden to the Faithful by the unambiguous prohibition of holy writ; but the rulers of Islam indulged to the full, and their minstrels vied with one another to celebrate the praises of the daughter of the grape. (Aspects of Islamic Civilization, p. 15, 1967)

It must not be assumed, however, that only the distant cities such as Cordova and Baghdad were contaminated by the vices of luxury and opulence. Makkah and Medina themselves were not immune to their allurements.

Ella Marmura

The love theme poetry found expression in two different genres. One was gay, light-hearted and urbane, and this grew in the cities of Mecca and Medina. Both were cities of affluence but shorn of political power. Many of the young Muslim aristocrats excluded from public office, frittered away their wealth in the pursuit of pleasure. Schools of singing had sprung up and a number of love lyrics were set to music. The leader of this school of poetry was 'Umar ibn Abi Rabiah (d. 720), a Meccan aristocrat. The second genre of ghazal flourished most among the Bedouin, portraying an intensity of feeling and depicting all the anguish and despair of tragic love. ("Arabic Literature: a Living Heritage," published in the book, Introduction to Islamic Civilization, edited by R. M. Savory, New York, 1976)

Philip K. Hitti

Mecca's surrender meant its acceptance of Islam. One after the other the Quraish moved on to the new capital (Medina) to share in the promotion of the new faith and to embark on new careers. The highest positions in the government and the army were open to them. Many Quraishis took part in the campaigns that in the orthodox period, particularly under Umar ibn al-Khattab, resulted in the conquests of the Fertile Crescent, Persia and Egypt. Later some served as governors of provinces in the newly acquired domain. Life in Mecca then developed along two opposite lines, one of revelry and the other of piety.

In the wake of the conquests, booty, tribute, and taxes found their way in abundance into the city; they became its new source of income. This more than compensated for the loss of caravan trade. Pilgrimage, of course, continued; in fact it increased. Once a center of commerce, Mecca now became a center of pleasure. Its nouveaux riches brought along harem, dancers, and singers, male and female, as well as new concepts of what constitute the good life. They lived in baronial style in villas and surroundings the like of which Mecca had never seen before. (pp. 21-22).

At the same time, life in Medina, as in Mecca, was developing along a different line, the line of worldliness. After all, the golden stream from the provinces in the form of personal and land tax poured into Medina first. The volume flooding the state treasury was overwhelming. In its bid for the patronage of the new elite of pleasure-seekers, Medina had, over her rival to the south, the advantage of higher altitude, richer water supply, and more extensive gardens. Retired government officials, civil and military, brought along their slaves and concubines, their singers, dancers and musicians, male and female - and created an atmosphere never seen before in the Holy City. (p. 55) (Capital Cities of Arab Islam, 1973)

Such was Medina even after its status had been "scaled down," and it had become a provincial town. But if it had remained the political and the commercial capital of the empire of the Muslims, it would, without a doubt, also have become their "entertainment" capital, attracting all the Bohemian characters of the times, in quest of the pleasures of the senses.

(4). Al-Qur'an al-Majid, the Book of God, was revealed in immaculate Arabic. Makkah and Medina were the cradles of Qur'anic Arabic. People speaking alien languages and living in the capital of their conquerors, corrupt their language (the language of the conquerors). If Medina had remained the imperial capital, the Qur'anic Arabic would, inevitably, have been subjected to many alien influences. The Qur'anic sciences and its exegesis, and its lexicon, did not exist in any organized form in the

first century of Hijra. But it was essential for the understanding of Qur'an by the contemporary generation and by the generations to come that the speech of Makkah and Medina should remain as it was in the time of the Prophet so that the words of Arabic would not acquire meanings different from those which were current in his time.

All living languages change, and words change their meanings. Like any other living organism, words also are born and they also die. And like any other living organism, they are also susceptible to alien and extraneous influences. Its best example is the "pidginizing" of modern English. Arabic too would have been "pidginized" but it was saved from this fate by Ali who changed the direction of the traffic of the aliens away from Medina. He is, thus, the first and the greatest benefactor of the Arabic language and of the Qur'anic sciences.

(5). The Umayyad rulers of Damascus lived in imitation of the Byzantine and Persian emperors. They had surrounded themselves with all the instruments of luxury and salacity which their power could procure for them. The pristine simplicity and the egalitarianism of Islam had disappeared from Syria if they had ever existed there in the first place. Ali, however, wished to present to the world the real picture of Islam. He wished to present to the world the same picture of Islam that Muhammad Mustafa had first presented to the Arabs in Makkah and Medina. But it was a picture that the neighbors of Syria and most of the Syrians themselves had never seen. In fact, in the years to come, their rulers were going to show to them the picture, not of Islam, but of anti-Islam.

John Alden Williams

All of the Persian kings, from Ardashir son of Papak to Yazdagird, separated themselves from their courtiers by a curtain.

I once asked (the great court musician) Ishaq ibn Ibrahim al-Mawsili, Did the Umawi caliphs show themselves to their familiars and singers?' He replied, 'Muawiya and Marwan I, Abd al-Malik, Walid I, Sulayman, Hisham and Marwan II, were separated from their familiars by a curtain, so that none of the courtiers saw what the caliph was doing, if he was transported by the music, or shook his shoulders, or danced, or threw off his clothing, so none but his special slaves saw him. As for the rest of the Umawi caliphs, they were not ashamed to dance or throw off their garments and expose their nakedness in the presence of their familiars and singers. But for that, none of them was like Yazid ibn Abd al-Malik and Walid ibn Yazid for shamelessness and obscene speech in the presence of their familiars, and taking off their clothes, not caring what they did.' (p.

81). (Life at the Caliph's Court:' from the Book of the Crown (Kitab al-Taj), Cairo, 1914, p.5. Anonymous: between 847-861 A.D." – Themes of Islamic Civilization, Berkeley, 1971)

When Ali made Kufa his capital, friend and foe saw with their own eyes the Islam of Muhammad, the Messenger of God. They saw that the real sovereign of the Muslims worked with his own hands in the fields and gardens, and fed himself and his family from the wages that he earned himself. They saw that he lived on coarse barley bread but everyone else in his dominion was well-fed. They saw that though his own shirt was covered with patches, his subjects were all well dressed. They also saw that he had no marble palace but lived in a mud hut, and that there were no sentinels or pickets at the door of his home, and that he was accessible to everyone at every hour of the day or night.

(6). In the interests of the security of Makkah and Medina, Ali wished to make them politically unimportant so that they would not attract unwelcome attentions. The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth which Muhammad Mustafa had founded, had ceased, after his death, to be "heavenly," and had become an ersatz Greek or Persian government. Under the changed conditions, the dignity and the sacred character of the twin cities of Makkah and Medina were always in peril. Foreseeing the times ahead, Ali put both cities out of the orbit of political events. His younger son, Husain, also had the same anxiety to protect the sanctity of the city of his grandfather. He too saw the storm clouds massing at the horizon, and he too left Medina and Makkah, just in time, to draw the attention of the government, away from them.

After the butchery of Kerbala in 680, it were the holy cities of Islam – Medina and Makkah – which attracted the attention of Yazid, the son of Muawiya. He sent his general, Muslim bin Aqaba, to Medina with a Syrian army which massacred 10,000 citizens in cold blood. The dead included many companions of the Prophet. Medina was abandoned to the pleasure of the army of occupation. The Great Mosque of the Prophet was converted into a stable for the Syrian cavalry. Those few who were not slaughtered, had to take the oath of allegiance to Yazid. Muslim bin Aqaba told them that Yazid was the master of their lives, and could sell them into slavery, if he wished to do so.

Alfred Guillaume

Between the period covered by the Sira and the editing of the book itself loom the two tragedies of Karbala, when Husayn and his followers were slain in 61 A.H., and the sack of Medina in 63 A.H. when some ten thousand of the Ansar including no less than eighty of the Prophet's

Companions were put to death. (The Life of Muhammad, page xxvii, 1967)

Muslim bin Aqaba left Medina smoldering in ruins and then marched on Makkah. But he died before reaching his destination, and the command of his forces passed to another officer of Yazid, one Ibn Nameer.

In Makkah, Abdullah bin Zubayr had proclaimed himself a khalifa. Ibn Nameer bombarded the city from the surrounding hills and burned the Kaaba. But he had not captured the city yet when Yazid died in Damascus. Thereupon, ibn Nameer raised the siege, and withdrew to Syria.

But all that Makkah and Abdullah bin Zubayr got, was a reprieve. When Abdul Malik bin Marwan became khalifa, Makkah once again became a theater of war. His general, Hajjaj bin Yusuf, laid siege to Makkah, bombarded it, and demolished part of the Kaaba. Abdullah bin Zubayr held out for seven months. He was killed in the precincts of the Kaaba, and the city surrendered to the conquerors.

Philip K. Hitti

In 683 a Syrian army was sent by Yazid against the caliphal claimant Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr. The rebel sought sanctuary on the inviolable soil of the sanctuary but was nevertheless attacked and the Kaaba caught fire. The Black Stone was split in three pieces. The house of Allah, in the words of the great historian, al-Tabari, "looked like the torn bosom of a mourning woman." (Capital Cities of Islam, 1973)

Ali sought, by changing the capital, to save Medina and Makkah from the fate which befell them notwithstanding his efforts to the contrary. But then who else in the entire Muslim world shared his and his children's solicitude for the reverence and safety of these two cities? When Husain ibn Ali sensed that danger was approaching them, he immediately left, with all members of his family, for Iraq, where he knew, he had a rendezvous with death. But Abdullah bin Zubayr had no hesitation in inviting desecration and destruction upon them, and massacre upon their inhabitants.

The Muslim world has yet to acknowledge its debt of gratitude to Ali for his vision, foresight and humanity. He protected the cradles of Islam in his lifetime, and took steps for their protection after his death. There was no other way in which he could have saved Hijaz from experiencing the dislocations, turbulence and trauma caused by politics and war, except by transferring the capital from Medina to Kufa.

When Ali changed the capital of the empire, Muawiya thought that he had, at last, caught Ali doing something that was open to question, and

wrote to him that he (Ali) had "abandoned" the city of the Prophet - an act so "reprehensible" that it could not be condoned.

Only four years later, Muawiya himself became the absolute ruler of the empire of the Muslims, and there was no one who could question him on any of his actions. If he had so much love for the city of the Prophet as he affected to show in his letter to Ali, he could have made it his capital. But he did not nor did any of his successors, nor did any of the caliphs of the Abbasi dynasty.

Chapter 63

The Revival of the Umayyads

THE BANU UMAYYA WERE ONE OF THE CLANS OF THE QURAYSH IN MAKKAH. As noted before, they were the traditional enemies of the Banu Hashim – another clan of the Quraysh. When Muhammad, a member of the clan of Banu Hashim – declared that he was the Apostle of God, and called upon the Arabs to abandon their idolatry, and to believe in One God, the Umayyads opposed him, and they fought against him for twenty years.

But they failed. Their long and bitter struggle against Muhammad and Islam came to a humiliating end in A.D. 630 when he conquered Makkah. They had to concede defeat, and they "accepted" Islam.

The victory of Islam, however, kindled new fires of hatred in the hearts of the Banu Umayya against its guardians – Muhammad and Ali, as noted in an earlier chapter. They were discreet enough to conceal their hatred of Muhammad but they made no attempt to conceal their hatred of Ali. It was Ali who had destroyed not only the visible emblems of the religion of the Umayyads but also had struck the death blow to their privileges. But they soon showed that they might be down but they were not out. They, therefore, marked time for thirty years - until A.D. 661 – when they were, at last, able to capture the long-sought prize – the caliphate of the Muslims. The Banu Umayya were the most rabid of all the enemies of Islam. Their success in capturing the caliphate of the Muslims, therefore, has evoked much surprise among historians. Following are the observations of some of them on this paradox in the history of the Muslims.

Edward Gibbon

The persecutors of Mohammed usurped the inheritance of his children; and the champions of idolatry became the supreme heads of his religion and empire. The opposition of Abu Sophian had been fierce and obstinate; his conversion was tardy and reluctant; his new faith was

fortified by necessity and interest; he served, he fought, perhaps he believed; and the sins of the time of ignorance were expiated by the recent merits of the family of Ommayyah. Muawiya, the son of Abu Sophian, and of the cruel Hinda, was dignified in his early youth with the office or title of the secretary of the Prophet; the judgment of Omar entrusted him with the government of Syria; and he administered that province above forty years, either in a subordinate or supreme rank. The sacred duty of pursuing the assassins of Othman was the engine and pretense of his ambition. (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

E. A. Freeman

The caliphate might conceivably be allotted to the worthiest of the faithful; it might conceivably be hereditary in the family of the apostle; but Mohammed could never have imagined that it would become hereditary in the family of his bitterest enemies. (History of the Saracens)

R. A. Nicholson

When the Meccan aristocrats accepted Islam, they only yielded to the inevitable. They were now to have an opportunity to revenging themselves. Uthman b. Affan, who succeeded Umar as Caliph, belonged to a distinguished Meccan family, the Umayyads or descendants of Umayya, which had always taken a leading part in the opposition to Mohammed, though Uthman himself was among the Prophet's first disciples. He was a pious, well-meaning old man - an easy tool in the hands of his ambitious kinsfolk. They soon climbed into all the most lucrative and important offices and lived on the fat of the land, while too often their ungodly behavior gave point to the question whether these converts of the eleventh hour were not still heathens at heart. Other causes contributed to excite a general discontent. The rapid growth of luxury and immorality in the Holy Cities as well as in the new settlements was an eyesore to the devout Moslems. The true Islamic aristocracy, the Companions of the Prophet, headed by Ali, Talha and Zubayr, strove to undermine the rival nobility which threatened them with destruction. The factious soldiery were ripe for revolt against Umayyad arrogance and greed. Rebellion broke out, and finally, the aged caliph, after enduring a siege of seven weeks, was murdered in his own house. (A Literary History of the Arabs, p. 190, 1969)

Nicholson has erred in stating that Ali, Talha and Zubayr strove to undermine the Umayyads who threatened them with destruction. Ali did not strive to undermine the Umayyads though Talha and Zubayr strove to undermine Uthman, and they were successful in their efforts. On their part, the Umayyads threatened Ali – but they did not threaten Talha and

Zubayr – with destruction. In fact, Talha, Zubayr and Ayesha fought the battle of Basra (the battle of the Camel) against Ali, with the support of the Umayyads.

Philip K. Hitti

Of the eight (Umayyad) caliphs in the period (715-750) two only were worthy of the heritage generated by Muawiya and enriched by Abd-al-Malik and al-Walid. The remaining six, three of whom were sons of slave mothers, were incompetent, some dissolute if not degenerate. The brother-successor of al-Walid was more interested in drinking, hunting, and listening to song and music than in conducting state affairs. His son excelled the father. He spent more time in his pleasure houses in the desert, where their ruins are still visible, than in the capital. He is said to have indulged himself in swimming in a pool of wine and gulping enough of it to lower its surface. More than an incorrigible libertine, this caliph once committed an act of unusual sacrilege; making a target of Koran copy for the arrows of his bow. Clearly, the sudden increase of wealth, the super-abundance of slaves and concubines, the multiplied facilities for indulgence in luxury, and other characteristic vices of an affluent urban civilization - against which sons of the desert had developed no measure of immunity - were beginning to sap Arab vitality. (Capital Cities of Arab Islam, pp. 78-79, 1973)

Arnold J. Toynbee

One of the greatest ironies of all history is the fate of the house that Mohammed built. Mohammed had a great fall. The unsuccessful prophet succumbed to the temptation to succeed as a statesman and a strategist. Yet, in seeking and winning worldly success in Medina, Mohammed was unwittingly working for his adversaries in Mecca. When it came to a competition in Realpolitik, the merchant princes of Mecca were more than a match for their queer fellow-townsman, and far more than a match for Mohammed's gallant but incompetent cousin and son-in-law, Ali. After Mohammed had successfully cut Mecca's trade route to Syria, the Meccans capitulated on the easy terms that the sentimental Meccan exile offered them; but in outwardly submitting to Mohammed and to Islam, the Beni Umayya had their tongues in their cheeks. They had no intention of being permanently deposed from power. Now that they had failed first to suppress Islam and then to repel it, their only alternative was to run away with it after capturing it by the stratagem of a nominal conversion. They bided their time till in Ali they found their victim and in Muawiya their man of destiny.

Muawiya was one of the greatest masters, known to history, of the artful, patient type of statesmanship. He ranks with Augustus, Philip of Macedon, Liu Pang, and Cavour. Poor Ali was utterly outmaneuvered by him. Within twenty-nine years of Mohammed's death, the state that Mohammed had founded, and that his successors had swiftly expanded into a vast empire, became the undisputed spoil of Muawiya the son of Hind: that redoubtable Meccan merchant-princess who had been Mohammed's bitterest enemy. Unlike Mohammed, Muawiya founded a dynasty - the House of Umayyah - which lasted for 90 years and ruled the world from Multan and Tashqand to Aden, and from Aden to Gibralter and Narbonne.

Muawiya and his successors, being, unrepentant pagans in all but name (save only for one sincere Muslim, the Caliph Umar II), they went to the limits of discretion in flouting Islam by indulging in the worst abominations of civilization. They were wine-bibbers, and they decorated their palaces with mosaics and paintings in the Hellenistic style that had been endemic in Syria for the last 1000 years. They reveled in breaking the Islamic taboo on the representation of living forms. They employed Christian artists who were adepts in this line; and they were not content with representation of animals and men. Their favorite orders were for pictures of women - preferably naked, or at least naked down to the waist.

How did the Umayyads manage to get away with this indecency and impiety for as long as 90 years? When Jezebel and Ahab flouted the orthodox worship of Yahwah, retribution was swift. So, how did the Umayyads contrive to fare so much better than the House of Omri? One may not like or admire the Umayyads, but their adroitness does command our reluctant respect, and one cannot help being grateful for the works of art that they have bequeathed to us. (East to West – A Journey Round the World, 1958. pp. 214-215 – The Shocking Umayyads)

Toynbee may claim to be a great historian but the claim does not necessarily make his opinions, which he has expressed so pontifically, in the foregoing excerpt, either correct or even intelligent. By affecting to sneer at Muhammad and Ali, he is only betraying his own astigmatism, so characteristic of the 19th century British missionaries in the colonies. His opinions are more in the nature of a diatribe or a polemic, not without the occasional touch of the ridiculous, than any objective and critical analysis of facts.

The preliminary remarks are quite arresting. Toynbee says "one of the greatest ironies of all history is the fate of the house that Mohammed

built. Mohammed had a great fall." The "irony" must have had causes but Toynbee does not say what they were. He is taking into account only the effects.

Toynbee is a product of the modern, Western, materialistic, mechanistic culture, and Muslims may overlook his inability to grasp the ethos of Islam. The success of Islam was very much predicated on the classical idea (the idea of Prophet Abraham) of sacrifice. Muhammad and Ali sacrificed not only their material wealth but also sacrificed many valuable lives to make Islam viable. When, after their death, Islam called for fresh sacrifices, their children were ready to offer them. The grandchildren of Muhammad and the children of Ali sacrificed their lives in Kerbala for the ideals which both of them had striven to make immortal.

The sacrifices made by Muhammad, Ali and their children, are the triumph and the glory of Islam but Toynbee equates them with "irony."

Muhammad did not have a "fall" – great or small – even though Toynbee might wish that he had one.

Toynbee called Muhammad an "unsuccessful prophet" who "succumbed to the temptation to succeed as a statesman." How was he "unsuccessful"? His duty was to deliver God's last message to mankind, and he delivered it, and it was accepted in all parts of the Arabian peninsula within his lifetime. Nor did he succumb to the temptation to become a statesman. He was a statesman. His mission was comprehensive, and one of his duties as God's messenger was to educate the Muslims in the principles of political organization. This he did in Medina.

Muhammad was not in "competition" with the pagans or the crypto-pagans of Makkah. He came to this world to promulgate the laws of the Kingdom of Heaven, and not to "compete" with anyone, least of all with the Makkan usurers and the worshippers of idols. To insinuate that he was competing with the Umayyads, is the most ludicrous of all the opinions of Toynbee.

The idolaters of Makkah were not "more than a match" either for Muhammad or for Ali, and Ali was not "incompetent," and he was not "outmaneuvered" by Muawiya. Toynbee is incapable of "judging" them from the viewpoint of the ethos of Islam. His "Realpolitik" could have held no interest for Muhammad and Ali. His deductions are inevitably influenced by his culture - the opportunistic, secular culture of the modern West. He is ignorant of the culture of Qur'an, and Qur'an spurns "Realpolitik."

Muhammad and Ali were demonstrating to the world that in politics no less than in religion, ends do not justify the means. In Islam, the

means themselves become the ends. The means which their enemies – the Umayyads – employed to achieve their ends, had built-in guarantees of "success." But Muhammad and Ali did not judge success or failure by the same standards as the Umayyads did or as Toynbee does. To Muhammad and Ali, success was only the winning of the pleasure of God, and failure was only the forfeiting of that pleasure. Judging by this standard, both of them were highly successful. May God bless them and their children forever and forever.

Toynbee further says that the Umayyads had no intention of being permanently deposed from power.

Did the intentions of the Umayyads mean anything in A.D.630 when Muhammad conquered Makkah? He had destroyed their polytheism and economic and political power, and Ali had destroyed their military power. They were prostrate at his feet, and they would have remained prostrate forever if Abu Bakr and Umar had not picked them up, and had not restored economic and political power to them. Suddenly, what had seemed impossible under Muhammad, looked inevitable under Abu Bakr and Umar. It were both of them who made the empire of the Muslims "the undisputed spoil of Muawiya the son of Hind."

The admiration, respect and gratitude which Toynbee "cannot help" giving to the Umayyads, is perfectly understandable. He is their philosophical ally. Both of them are linked together in their common hostility to Islam and to its guardians, Muhammad and Ali.

Toynbee's "verdict" on Muhammad and Ali, is a classic of the solemn nonsense that famous scholars are capable of producing.

Both Hitti and Toynbee have drawn a portrait of some of the khalifas – the successors of the Prophet of Islam – that the Banu Umayya produced. The fact that the Muslim umma was saddled with such khalifas, is truly "one of the greatest ironies of all history." But does the irony have an explanation?

It has. This book is an attempt to explain that irony.

The Banu Umayya had enjoyed some local importance in Makkah as guardians of the pantheon of idols and as wealthy usurers. When Muhammad conquered Makkah, he put an end to their idolatry and to their usury, and they went into eclipse.

But the eclipse didn't last long. It lasted only from the conquest of Makkah by Muhammad in February 630 to his death in June 632. Just as the "sun" of Prophethood sank under the horizon, the "star" of the Umayyads rose above it.

It will not be correct to pinpoint the revival of the Banu Umayya from the date Uthman became khalifa nor even from the date Muawiya seized the khilafat but from June 8, 632, the date of the death of Muhammad Mustafa, the Prophet of Islam.

What is the correlation between the death of Muhammad and the revival of the Banu Umayya?

As noted above, Muhammad was responsible for the eclipse of the Banu Umayya. But as soon as he died, they bounced back from their eclipse, though not on their own power. Abu Bakr and Umar, the new rulers of the government Muhammad had founded, lifted the Banu Umayya from their eclipse and obscurity, and planted them as a force on the political landscape of Islam.

The Banu Umayya rose with a grim resolution – to seek retaliation from Muhammad and Ali and/or their children.

The acceptance of Islam by the Banu Umayya, after their failure to destroy it, was only proof of their resiliency. They realized that their frontal attacks on Islam had all failed, and that they had to try something unconventional. They did. Their new strategy was to enter the ranks of the faithful, disguised as Muslims; to watch the events from within, and then to strike at Islam when the opportune moment presented itself, as noted in an earlier chapter.

The opportune moment came after the death of Muhammad.

Notice has already been taken of the offer of Abu Sufyan, the chief of the clan of Banu Umayya, to Ali, to fill the streets of Medina with infantry and cavalry, ready and willing to die at his (Ali's) command, if he would challenge the government of Saqifa.

Abu Sufyan had struck a deadly blow at Islam but he missed once again. He had tried to ingratiate himself with Ali, the Guardian of Islam, but had failed. The latter was alert as ever. But Abu Sufyan was not fazed by his failure. It occurred to him that if he tried to ingratiate himself with the leaders of the Saqifa government, he might find them more responsive than Ali. He did and they were!

During the caliphate of their patrons, Abu Bakr and Umar, the Banu Umayya quietly consolidated their position. They didn't try to rock the boat and make waves. Time was not ripe yet for them to make an attempt at storming the stage of Islam. They, therefore, kept a low profile. But when Uthman became khalifa, they felt that the time had come for them to cast off their caution and restraint, and they fell upon the empire like vultures, ready to devour everything. Uthman dismissed all the governors of the provinces who had been appointed by Abu Bakr and Umar,

and filled the vacancies with members of his own family and clan. He also gave the Umayyads the most fertile lands and pastures as their estate, and bestowed upon them all the gold and silver in the public treasury.

In 656 Ali took the reins of the government in his hands. He dismissed all the governors who were plundering the country, and he ordered the Umayyads to restore to the State all the lands, fiefs, estates and pastures which they had appropriated illegally.

But the Umayyads had no intention of giving up anything. They made it clear that they would hang on, as long as possible, to their former positions, their perquisites and their privileges, and if Ali still wanted them, he would have to take them by force of arms.

Ali knew it that he would meet massive resistance if he tried to distribute wealth equitably. But he put his duty toward God and the Muslim umma ahead of the wishes or the resentments of the privileged classes in the Dar-ul-Islam. He had no choice in the matter, and he had to destroy the bastions of privilege regardless of consequences. In this matter, there was absolutely no room for compromise.

President Jimmy Carter

This is no job for the faint-hearted. It will be met with violent opposition from those who now enjoy a special privilege, those who prefer to work in the dark, or those whose private fiefdoms are threatened. (Why Not the Best? p. 148, 1975)

A showdown was inevitable.

Talha and Zubayr were out of the military equation, and Ali's new confrontation was with the old adversaries - the Umayyads - the ideological saboteurs of Islam. This confrontation was proof of Umar's success in polarizing the Arabs between the many enemies and the few friends of the House of Muhammad, the Messenger of God.

The challenge of the Umayyads to Ali was a manifestation of the reaction of paganism against Islam. For a long time, the hatred of the Banu Umayya against Islam and the Banu Hashim had smoldered like embers but with the accession of Ali to the throne of caliphate, it had turned into roaring flames, threatening to burn down, in the words of Toynbee, "the house that Mohammed built."

After the battle of Basra (the battle of the Camel), all members of the clan of Banu Umayya had rallied behind Muawiya, the governor of Syria. He was their leader, and he was the leader of the pagan reaction against Islam. In his war against Ali, he was aided and abetted by Amr

bin Aas. Amr was a non-Umayyad but an identity of interests prompted his alignment with Muawiya.

Following is a brief introduction to the antecedents of Muawiya and Amr bin Aas. It will acquaint the reader with the mainsprings of their opposition to Ali.

Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan

Muawiya was the son of Hinda and Abu Sufyan. Abu Sufyan was Hinda's third husband. She was one of the bitterest enemies of Islam, its Prophet and his family. In the battle of Badr, her father, Utba, was killed by Hamza. Her eldest son, Hanzala; her brother, Walid; and her uncle, Shaiba; were killed by Ali. Thereupon, she vowed that she would drink their blood (M. Shibli in Sirat-un-Nabi, vol. I, page 370, 4th printing, 1976, Azamgarh, India). In the battle of Uhud, she cut open the abdomen of Hamza, took out his liver, and chewed it up, and ever-since became "famous" in history as "the liver-eater."

If Muawiya was the son of Hinda, the liver-eater of Uhud, he was also the father of Yazid, the butcher of Kerbala, who let loose terror upon and massacred the younger grandson and great-grandchildren of Muhammad. One of the companions of the Prophet who took the oath of allegiance to Yazid, was Abdullah bin Umar bin al-Khattab. He was a "ringside" spectator of that massacre in Kerbala in which the pages of the history of Islam were stained with the most sacrosanct blood in all creation.

Yazid was perky with a long and "distinguished" pedigree of hostility to the Banu Hashim – the Guardians of Islam.

When the Prophet conquered Makkah in 630, Abu Sufyan, Hinda, their sons, Yazid and Muawiya, and other members of the Banu Umayya, accepted Islam. Jalal-ud-Din Suyuti writes on page 135 of his book, History of the Caliphs:

"Muawiya accepted Islam with his father, Abu Sufyan on the day Makkah was conquered. They were present in the battle of Hunayn, and they were among the muallafatul-qulub."

Some historians say that after the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet appointed Muawiya as one of his scribes. As a scribe, his duty, perhaps, was to write letters of the Prophet.

Both in Makkah and in Medina, the Prophet had made each Muslim a "brother" of another Muslim. He, therefore, gave Muawiya also a "brother."

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

The Apostle established brotherhood between Mu'awiya b. Abu Sufyan and al-Hutat. The Apostle did this between a number of his companions, e.g., between Abu Bakr and Umar; Uthman and Abdur Rahman bin Auf; Talha b. Ubaydullah and Zubayr b. Awwam; Abu Dharr al-Ghiffari and al-Miqdad b. Amr al-Bahrani; and Muawiya b. Abu Sufyan and al-Hutat b. Yazid al-Mujashi'i. Al-Hutat died in the presence of Muawiya during his caliphate and by virtue of his brotherhood, Mu'awiya took what he left as his heir. Al-Farazdaq said to Mu'awiya:

"Your father and my uncle, O Muawiya, left an inheritance,

So that his next of kin might inherit it.

But how come you to devour the estate of al-Hutat

When the solid estate of Harb was melting in your hand?" (The Life of the Messenger of God)

As noted before, Abu Bakr had appointed Yazid bin Abu Sufyan, as one of his generals in the Syrian campaign. Syria was conquered after the death of Abu Bakr – in the caliphate of Umar. He appointed Yazid the first governor of Syria. In 639, however, plague broke out in Syria and Palestine, and killed thousands of people, among them Yazid bin Abu Sufyan and Abu Obaida ibn al-Jarrah. In Yazid's vacancy, Umar appointed his (Yazid's) younger brother, Muawiya, as the new governor.

Sir John Glubb

There was a disastrous famine in the Hijaz in 639. In addition to the famine, the year 639 witnessed an outbreak of bubonic plague in Syria and Palestine. Many Arabs died, until great numbers sought refuge in the desert from the plague-infested cities. Before this migration to the desert could be completed, however, the commander-in-chief, Abu Ubaida, was himself struck down and died. He was buried in the Jordan valley. Yezeed ibn Abu Sofian, who had played a distinguished part as a column commander throughout the Syrian campaign, was also a victim.

The indefatigable khalif decided himself to visit Syria in order to reorganize the administration after the loss of so many leaders. Indeed so fatal had been the plague among the Arabs, 25,000 of whom are said to have died, that it was feared the Byzantine might seize the opportunity to attempt the re-conquest of Syria.

In place of Abu Ubaida and Yezeed ibn Abu Sofian, Muawiya ibn Abu Sofian, was appointed governor of Syria. (The Great Arab Conquests, p. 214, 1967)

Muawiya was Umar's governor in Syria during the rest of his caliphate. When Uthman succeeded Umar as khalifa, he too confirmed him (Muawiya) as his governor. Muawiya adopted a policy of religious

tolerance vis-à-vis the Christians in Syria, and he carefully and skillfully cultivated the Syrians so that he became very popular with them.

Franceso Gabrieli

The son of Abu Sufyan had already been put by Omar in the government of Syria, the conquest of which he had participated in under the orders of his older brother, Yazid. Twenty years of sapient rule had won him the attachment of the Arab element stationed there. (The Arabs, A Compact History, p. 74, 1963)

Muawiya made Syria impregnable, and he made himself invulnerable during the caliphate of his patrons, Umar and Uthman.

E. A. Belyaev

While he was still only viceroy of Syria, Muawiya created a strong material base for himself, his kin and his military following, becoming a very big landlord by large-scale seizure of land. The Umayyad Caliph Muawiya rested on far stronger economic foundations and possessed more trustworthy armed forces than his political opponents. He had become the all-powerful permanent viceroy of the rich and civilized Syria as early as the days of Omar, and having spent more than twenty years in this important post, became the recognized leader of Arab tribal aristocracy in Syria. (Arabs, Islam and the Arab Caliphate in the Early Middle Ages, 1969)

It was in this manner that Muawiya, the political phoenix of the Arabs, rose from the ashes of a failed effort to restore a pagan past, to become, first the arch-rival of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the successor of the Prophet, and then to become the successor himself!

Muawiya was a man of many innovations. He changed khilafat into monarchy, and openly boasted: "I am the first of the Arab kings." Monarchy, of course, has to be hereditary, and it had to be hereditary in his family. He, therefore, made Yazid, his son, his successor. Even those Muslims who either condoned or connived at his crimes, winced when he struck this blow for his family.

The designation by Muawiya of his son, Yazid, as khalifa, was a flagrant breach of the pledge he had given to Hasan ibn Ali not to appoint his own successor. But Muawiya was not the man to be inhibited by any pledge or code of ethics. Ethics in his hands became the first casualty.

Muawiya, however, was aware that Muslims would not willingly accept Yazid as their khalifa. He, therefore, silenced opposition with gold and silver or with bluff and threats. But if these weapons failed, then he employed a subtle, secret and fail-safe weapon – poison. He was a "pioneer" in Muslim history in the art of silencing his critics and

opponents forever through poison. Anticipating opposition from Hasan to Yazid's succession, he engineered his death. The historian, Masoodi, writes:

"Muawiya sent word to Jo'dah bint Ash'ath, the wife of Hasan, that if she would kill her husband, he would pay her 100,000 dirhems, and would marry his son, Yazid, to her."

Muawiya awakened in Jo'dah the ambition to become a queen, and when he sent the poison to her, as it was arranged between them, she administered it to her husband, and he died from it. Muawiya rewarded her by paying 100,000 dirhems, but backed out of his promise to marry her to Yazid by saying: "I love my son."

Abdur Rahman bin Khalid bin al-Walid, an ex-governor of Hims (Emessa) was also liquidated in a similar manner. Once Muawiya paid a visit to Hims; he went into the mosque, and addressing the congregation, said:

"I have become too old now and am not far from death.

I, therefore, wish to appoint someone as your ruler."

Muawiya was secretly hoping that to please him, the people of Hims would suggest the name of Yazid as the next khalifa. But no one wanted the depraved Yazid as khalifa. On the other hand, the people adored Abdur Rahman bin Khalid bin al-Walid, and proposed his name to be the future khalifa of the Muslims. Muawiya dissembled his disappointment and returned to Damascus. The popularity of Abdur Rahman frightened him, and he began to look at him as a potential rival for the throne. He, therefore, made up his mind to do something to make the throne "safe" for his son, Yazid.

Sometime later, Abdur Rahman fell ill, and became bedridden. Muawiya persuaded Abdur Rahman's physician to mix poison in his medicine and to administer it to him. In the event of his success, he promised to pay him (the physician), as his reward, the revenues of Hims for one full year. The physician agreed, and gave Abdur Rahman the "medicine" he had concocted. It did its work and killed him. (Isti'aab, vol. II, page 401) After the death of Uthman, most of the Muslims acknowledged Ali as the new head of the empire of the Muslims. But there were many others who did not, and Muawiya, of course, was one of them.

Ahmad ibn Daud Dinawari, the Arab historian, writes:

"The Muslim world acknowledged Ali as the supreme ruler of Islam but Muawiya and the rest of the Banu Umayya, who had made Syria their base, did not."

Ali sent an emissary to Muawiya demanding his allegiance. But instead of answering him, Muawiya detained the emissary at his court, and invited Amr bin Aas from Palestine for "consultation." He intended to enlist his (Amr's) support.

Amr bin Aas

Amr bin Aas was living in Palestine at this time, and was watching the political scene. He was thrilled to receive the invitation from Muawiya, and leapt to grab the opportunity. But his support, he told Muawiya, had a price, and it was Egypt.

To Muawiya the price appeared to be too high but after some hesitation he agreed to pay it in exchange for Amr's advice and services in the war which he was going to wage against Ali, the successor of the Apostle of God, and the Sovereign of all Muslims. Muawiya was going to appoint Amr bin Aas his governor in Egypt in the event of the latter's success in taking it from Ali. Amr bin Aas was destined to play an important, if sinister, part in the history of Islam. He was a man of extraordinary ability. His ability is attested by the high positions he held in the caliphates of Abu Bakr and Umar. There was a slur on his birth; he was born in the house of a "woman of the flags" in Makkah.

Edward Gibbon

The birth of Amrou was at once base and illustrious; his mother, a notorious prostitute, was unable to decide among the five of the Koreish; but the proof of resemblance adjudged the child to Aasi, the oldest of her lovers. (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

Washington Irving

One of the most redoubtable assailants of Mohammed was a youth named Amr; he was the son of a courtesan of Mecca, who seems to have rivaled in fascination the Phrynes and Aspasias of Greece, and have numbered some of the noblest of the land among her lovers. When she gave birth to this child, she mentioned several of the tribe of Koreish who had equal claim to the paternity. The infant was declared to have most resemblance to Aas, the oldest of her admirers, whence in addition to his name of Amr, he received the designation of Ibn al-Aas, the son of Aas.

Nature had lavished her choicest gifts upon this natural child, as if to atone for the blemish of his birth. Though young, he was already one of the most popular poets of Arabia. He assailed Mohammed with lampoon and humorous madrigals. (The Life of Mohammed)

R.V.C. Bodley

There was Amr ibn al Aas, the son of a beautiful Meccan prostitute. All the better Meccans were her friends, so that anyone, from Abu Sufyan down, might have been Amr's father. As far as anyone could be sure, he might have called himself Amr ibn Abi Lahab or ibn al Abbas or ibn anyone else among the Koreishite upper ten. (The Messenger, New York, p. 73, 1946)

Quraysh had once sent Amr as its ambassador to the court of Abyssinia to demand the extradition of the Muslim refugees from Makkah who had found sanctuary there. His mission, incidentally, was a failure.

In 629 Amr accepted Islam. After his conversion, the Apostle also sent him, on a few occasions, as the captain of the expeditions which raided the pagan tribes. The most important expedition that he led in the times of the Apostle, was the raid of Dhat el-Salasil in which he commanded a body of 500 men, among them Abu Bakr, Umar bin al-Khattab and Abu Obaida ibn al-Jarrah. This mission, incidentally, was successful.

Amr was Umar's governor in Egypt. But when Uthman became khalifa, he dismissed him, and he returned to Medina smarting with resentment. He was a consummate "specialist" in hatching conspiracies, in sowing dissension and in spreading disaffection. He applied these talents against Uthman, and mounted an attack of smear and innuendo against him. He openly boasted that he roused even the shepherds in the mountains to kill him (Uthman), and his boast was no empty twaddle. Uthman had driven him into political purgatory but he had no intention of languishing in silence forever while he could fancy him (Uthman) mocking at him in Medina, and he could envision his (Uthman's) favorites roistering in Egypt – a province which he (Amr) had added to the empire. He was resolved to act for himself.

The loss of power is one of the most painful experiences that can ever afflict a man. Not only is he deprived of the capacity to shape events but also of the outward symbols and trappings of office.

Talha and Zubayr had never shaped events. They made an attempt to seize the khilafat by force but they failed. The attempt cost them not only their lives but also their reputation. Amr bin Aas, on the other hand, had actually shaped events, and important ones too. But suddenly, Uthman made him a nonentity. From that moment, he seethed with vindictiveness, and "worked" diligently and indefatigably, to destroy the author of his frustrations – Uthman - the incumbent khalifa.

Soon Medina was ready to explode. Amr had built for himself, in earlier times, a palace in Palestine. Just before the explosion, he slipped out of Medina, and went to live in his palace. He then sat watching how his

efforts would bear fruit. When he heard that Uthman was killed, he was thrilled, and he openly gloated over his "success."

Amr's ability and foresight were beyond any question. By leaving Medina at the right moment, and by "rusticating" in Palestine, he saved himself not only from the charge, in his own time, of engineering the assassination of Uthman, but also from the indictment of history.

One thing that Amr knew was that he could not ingratiate himself with Ali. They represented two irreconcilable styles and philosophies. But he knew that an alliance with Muawiya was possible. Both were brilliant opportunists. Both had contributed to the murder of Uthman, one by goading the crowds to kill him, and the other by willfully withholding all succor from him. Now both were eager to reap the fruits of their success.

Therefore, Amr bin Aas and Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan – the two masters of plot, of intrigue, of ambiguity and paradox, of deceit and deception, of double-talk and single-purpose – forged an alliance, to prop and to buttress each other against Ali ibn Abi Talib. Their alliance rested, not on ideology but on the assessment of mutual interest. When Muawiya offered Amr the key position in his campaign hierarchy as the top political strategist, he (Amr) did not accept it until a more tangible quid pro quo was immediately perceptible to him. The quid pro quo was Egypt.

Taking the cue from the "triumvirate" of Basra, Amr advised Muawiya to launch a campaign of propaganda against Ali charging him with the murder of Uthman. Muawiya forthwith acted upon the advice, and opened the cold war against Ali.

In the main mosque of Damascus, the banner of the Banu Umayya was unfurled everyday after the midday prayer. Suspended to the banner were two other objects. One was a blood-stained shirt which Uthman was alleged to have been wearing when he was killed, and the other was the dissevered fingers of Naila, his wife. The Syrians walked around this banner, weeping, wailing and cursing Ali, the members of his family, and the Banu Hashim, and swearing that they would wreak vengeance upon the killers of Uthman. Professors Sayed Abdul Qadir and Muhammad Shuja-ud-Din write in their History of Islam that this was the beginning of the practice called "tabarree."

Muawiya and Amr bin Aas whipped up Syria into hysteria, so that every Syrian was raving mad against Ali, and was thirsting for his blood. After three months, Ali's emissary returned to Kufa to report to him the failure of his mission in Damascus.

Muawiya had opted for war against Ali. But Ali did not want war. He was most anxious to eschew war. Nothing was more repugnant to him than to see Muslims killing each other.

Hoping against hope, but not wishing to spare any effort, Ali addressed a letter to Muawiya. In his letter, he didn't try to remind Muawiya that the Apostle of God himself had designated him (Ali) as the sovereign of all Muslims. For Muawiya, he knew, this argument would not be very cogent. Instead, he took up another line of argument which was more likely to "appeal" to him. The purport of his letter was as follows:

"I call upon you to obey God and His Apostle, and to refrain from doing anything against the interests of the Muslims. You know that the same people who gave their pledge of loyalty to Abu Bakr and Umar, have now given me their pledge of loyalty. There is no room for argument in this matter. You know that the Muhajireen and the Ansar have elected the caliphs of the past, and now they have elected me. Other Muslims have also given me their pledge of loyalty. You too, therefore, should give me your pledge of loyalty. You have spread much mischief and falsehood in the name of vengeance for the blood of Uthman while you know only too well who spilled it. After taking the oath of allegiance to me, you present the case of the murder of Uthman, and I shall judge it in the light of the Book of God and the precedents of His Apostle, so that truth and falsehood would be separated."

But Muawiya had no desire to relinquish his ambitions. He believed that the one thing that could checkmate him in the realization of his ambitions, was peace. He, therefore, showed himself just as "allergic" to peace as the "triumvirs" of Basra had done before him. He had only one answer to Ali's appeals for peace, and that was war.

From Muawiya's point of view, the cry of vengeance for the murder of Uthman, was an excellent ploy to fight against Ali. He shed many a crocodile tear for the blood of Uthman but by his own conduct, both before and after his (Uthman's) murder, he proved that he did not give him (Uthman) a hoot. He raised an army of 80,000 warriors to fight against Ali but did not send a handful of men to Medina to break the blockade of Uthman's palace, and to save his life!

Uthman might have found it very comforting to know that a day would come when his critics would become his admirers, and his enemies would become his defenders – after his death. He had many critics in Medina, among them Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr but the most vehement of them all, as noted before, was Amr bin Aas. He might, in fact, have even been the real author of the crime of Uthman's murder. But by

a queer twist of fate, he – Amr bin Aas - the confederate of Muawiya – now marched, at the head of the Syrian army, to demand "justice" for Uthman's murder, of all people – from Ali!

Like Talha and Zubayr – his distinguished forerunners in the business of vengeance-seeking – Amr bin Aas is also a fascinating study in character inversion and ironic role reversal. He was a complex, enigmatic and protean figure defying attempts at analysis, classification and character identification.

One of the aims of Muawiya in waging a war of nerves against Ali was to compel him to adopt a policy of brutal repression of all those people who came to Medina from the provinces to see Uthman. Such a policy would have embroiled Ali in endless fighting. But Ali didn't adopt a policy of repression. He adopted a policy of persuasion, to the great disappointment of Muawiya. Muawiya's ploy did not work.

Muawiya demanded from Ali, as the "triumvirs" of Basra had done, the surrender to him of countless men who, he claimed, had taken part, directly or indirectly, in the murder of Uthman. This demand raises some fundamental questions such as:

1. Does the governor of a province of state have the right to demand from the lawfully constituted central government that it should surrender to him, the suspects in a murder case, even though the murder did not occur in his particular province? And does he have the right to threaten the central government that if it did not comply with his demand, he would wage war against it?

2. Muawiya was neither the heir nor the next-of-kin of Uthman; he was only a distant relative. Is there any example in the history of the judiciary of any country in which, not the next-of-kin, but a distant relative demands from the central government that it should surrender to him hundreds or thousands of those men whom he suspects to be accomplices in a murder? Can he take law into his own hands? Can the central government of a country allow its citizens to take law into their own hands? If it does, will anything be left of its authority, and will anything be left of law and order?

3. Muawiya had exchanged many letters with Ali. In one he wrote: "We shall hunt the killers of Uthman in every corner of the world, and we shall kill everyone of them. We shall not rest from this labor until, either we kill them all or we perish ourselves." An admirable resolution indeed! But when Muawiya became khalifa, did he implement his own resolution?

After the abdication from caliphate of Hasan ibn Ali in A.D. 661, Muawiya became the head of the empire of the Muslims. All the real or suspected murderers of Uthman were living in his empire. Did he arrest any of them, not to speak of executing any of them? Did he do so much as institute a formal investigation into the murder of Uthman? He did not. His ambition was to seize the caliphate. Once he realized it, he forgot Uthman!

The truth is that Muawiya actually wanted Uthman to be killed. It was his hope that there would be chaos after the murder of Uthman, and he would maneuver in it in his drive to capture power. When he demanded from Ali the surrender to him of the "murderers" of Uthman, he knew that they were scattered in Hijaz, Iraq and Egypt, and that it was impossible to round them up. But assuming that it was possible to apprehend them, it was still not possible to kill them all. But if it were possible to kill them all, it would still not be right to kill all of them for the murder of one individual.

Seeking and getting vengeance for a murder, is the right of the heir(s) of the victim, and it is the duty of the government to administer justice. Muawiya was neither the heir of Uthman nor he was the head of the government of the Muslims. He was no more an heir of Uthman than Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr had been. His and their only interest was in seizing the khilafat.

If Muawiya could not act in time to save the life of Uthman, he still had an opportunity to prove that he was a sincere vengeance-seeker for his murder. When three other vengeance-seekers, viz., Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr, challenged Ali, Muawiya should have gone to their aid. After all, all four of them were inspired by the same aim. The murder of Uthman had aroused the lust for blood in all of them. The identity of purpose ought to have forged strong links between them. But whatever reasons prevented Muawiya from going to Medina to save the life of Uthman, also prevented him from going to Basra to reinforce his "spiritual" allies.

The claim that Muawiya had no interest in Uthman, living or dead, is further strengthened by his answer to a question posed to him by a daughter of Uthman. When he became khalifa, he paid a visit to Medina. In Medina, he called on the family of Uthman whose daughter, Ayesha, asked him, rather pointedly, if he still remembered anything of his oft-repeated declaration that he was seeking vengeance for the murder of her father.

Muawiya answered her as follows:

"I have succeeded in restoring peace to the country after a great deal of trouble, and you should now be happy that you are called the daughter of one and the niece of another khalifa. But if for your sake, I were to start arresting and killing the murderers of your father, then that peace would vanish once again. If it does, then I may lose the power that I have won after such a hard struggle; and if that happens, then you would be reduced to the status of an ordinary woman." (Iqd-ul-Farid)

Muawiya, the pragmatist, had an infinite and an amazing capacity to equivocate!

For Muawiya, to achieve his ends, all means were fair. There was nothing that he could not do to become the khalifa of the Muslims. He could, in fact, go so far as to become the vassal of a non-Muslim power to fight against the lawful successor of the Apostle of God and the sovereign of all Muslims. In doing so, he was espousing a policy that struck at the very roots of Islam.

Sir John Glubb

In order to be free to confront his rival (Ali), Muawiya had concluded a truce with Byzantium under which he agreed to pay an annual tribute to the Emperor. (The Great Arab Conquests, p. 338, 1967)

D. M. Dunlop

Before Muawiya succeeded to the Caliphate, when after Siffin he remained in confrontation with Ali, he secured himself on his northern border by a truce with Byzantium, by the terms of which he agreed to pay what was in effect tribute to the Emperor Constans II, and in 678 towards the end of his Caliphate, after the failure of the great Arab assault on Constantinople in the so-called Seven Years' War and an attack by the Mardaites on his northern frontier, Muawiya again paid tribute to the Emperor, now Constantine IV. At a later date Byzantine armies invaded Syria and retook Antioch and Aleppo. (Arab Civilization to A.D. 1500, 1971)

The new "status" that Muawiya won as the vassal of the Byzantine emperor, set him free to wage war against Ali ibn Abi Talib, the successor of Muhammad, the Messenger of God. He fought against the Commander of the Faithful, against the veterans of Badr, against the Companions of the Tree of Fealty, and against the Muhajireen and the Ansar while he was protected by the Christians of the Eastern Roman Empire!

But for Muawiya, to be "flexible," the stakes did not have to be as high as a crown and a throne. He could be flexible in matters of lesser importance also. He had, for example, a sentimental attachment to money, and he believed that in making it, too much "old-fashioned" rigidity in the

application of Islamic principles was not quite necessary. The important thing for him was to make money. Ibn Ishaq, the biographer of the Prophet, has already been quoted on the subject of the seizure by Muawiya of the property of al-Hutat b. Yazid al-Mujashi'i, his "brother," at his death. This "brotherhood" worked entirely to his (Muawiya's) advantage. To fill his pockets, he could even sell idols. Muawiya, the successor of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, and the khalifa of the Muslims, could become a merchant of idols if he hoped that he would make some profit in the transaction.

Sir John Glubb

Sicily was raided more than once by the Arab fleet during the reign of Muawiya. A curious tradition relates that on one occasion the raiders carried off 'idols' of gold and silver, studded with pearls. It is perhaps significant of the change of Arab mentality that the khalif instead of utterly destroying such abominations, sent them on to India, where he thought that their sale would fetch a higher price. (The Great Arab Conquests, p. 355, 1967)

The sale of idols by Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan was clearly an atavistic relapse of the Umayyads. His actions were prompted on the basis, not of revealed (Islamic), but of nostalgic (pagan), values which were characteristic of the name and the bloodline of the Umayyads. He was, it appears, in search, perhaps subconsciously, of the "Lost Ignorance" of his dynasty. He reflected and shaped the post-Islamic Jahiliyya. His challenge to Ali, therefore, was not only or even primarily a physical one; it was a metaphysical one. Islam as a moral force, met the ultimate threat in Muawiya and in the Umayyads.

Chapter 64

The Battle of Siffin

TO DISSUADE MUAWIYA FROM WAGING WAR AGAINST THE MUSLIMS, Ali used all those argument that he had used, earlier, in his appeals to Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr for the same purpose, and the outcome in both cases was the same. In the perception of all his enemies, peace could only compound the already complex problems of the Dar-ul-Islam. They saw only one remedy for those problems, and that was war.

This time, however, Ali was confronted by an enemy who was far more subtle, devious, insidious and dangerous than the "triumvirate" of Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr had ever been. In fact, he was so subtle that in comparison, Talha and Zubayr were little more than political backwoodsmen.

In Basra, the rebel group was a coalition of disparate interests, and its members were held together only by their common hatred of Ali. It lacked singleness of purpose. Ayesha was fighting to elevate her nephew, Abdullah bin Zubayr, to the throne of khilafat. But Talha and Zubayr were not going to defer to her in this matter; they themselves were the candidates for that prize. Thus their coalition was far from being the one-for-all and all-for-one triumvirate that their supporters might have liked it to be.

The triumvirate of Basra was dogged and hobbled by their divided counsels but Muwaiya was not. He sought the advice of Amr bin Aas and others but he himself made all the decisions.

Ali was still in quest of unity. The unity of the umma of Muhammad was threatened by growing stresses and strains, and he was struggling to protect it and preserve it. But unfortunately, his enemies did not share this anxiety with him. Their only interest was to rip apart the unity of the umma, and they succeeded in ripping it apart.

In the spring of 657, Muawiya left Damascus with his army to carry war into Iraq. He crossed the boundary and halted at a village called Siffin – on the bank of the river Euphrates. His first act was to occupy the water-front.

Hearing the news of the advance of the Syrian army, Ali appointed Aqaba ibn Amr Ansari as governor of Kufa, called Abdullah ibn Abbas from Basra to accompany him, and left Kufa with his army for Siffin in April 657. "Seventy veterans of the battle of Badr and 250 Companions of the Tree of Fealty marched under his flag with the army along the banks of the Euphrates toward Siffin." (Mustadrak, vol. III).

Upon arrival in Siffin, Ali's army found its access to the water-front barred by a strong contingent of the Syrian troops. Ali sent Sa'sa' ibn Sauhan, a companion of the Prophet, to Muawiya, asking him to withdraw his pickets from the river, and to allow free access to water, to everyone. Muawiya, of course, refused to do so whereupon Ali ordered his troops to seize the water-front by force. His troops routed the Syrians, and captured the water-front. Now there was consternation and panic in the camp of Muawiya. He conjured up the specter of death in the desert by thirst. But Amr bin Aas assured him that Ali would never deny water to anyone.

The Syrians had no way to reach the water. Ali's generals were of the opinion that they should pay Muawiya back in his own coin. There was nothing easier for them than to let the whole Syrian army perish with thirst. But Ali gently reproved them for wishing to imitate an example which they themselves condemned, and he declared:

"The river belongs to God. There is no embargo on water for anyone, and whoever wishes, may take it."

Minor skirmishes began in Zilhajj 36 A.H., May 657. (Zilhajj is the last month of the Islamic calendar) and continued sporadically for the next few weeks. With the arrival of Moharram (the first month of the Islamic year), fighting was suspended for one month. During this month of truce (Moharram), Ali renewed his search for peace but his efforts to solve problems through negotiation, or to find solutions that would obviate fighting among the Muslims, were all fruitless for the simple reason that his adversary, Muawiya, didn't see peace as an option. He opposed détente because it was incompatible with his interests.

Ali should have been made cynical by duplicity, tragedy and bitter experience – yet he was ready to believe, despite all precedent, in a prospect for peace, and was ready to work for it.

When the last day of Moharram passed, and the month of Safar began, Ali sent Merthid ibn Harith to deliver a message to the Syrians. He stood in front of the Syrian army, and read the message as follows:

"O Syrians! Ali, the Chief of the Believers, informs you that he gave you every chance to verify the facts and to satisfy yourselves. He invited you to follow the Book of God but you have paid no attention. Now there is nothing more that he can tell you. Without a doubt, God does not befriend those who betray Truth." (Tabari, History, vol. IV, p. 6)

When the two armies faced each other, Ali promulgated the following ordinance to his troops just as he had done before the battle of Basra (the battle of the Camel):

"O Muslims! wait for your enemy to open hostilities, and defend yourselves only when he attacks you. If anyone of the enemy wishes to escape from the battle and to save his life, let him do so. If God gives you victory, do not plunder the camp of the enemy; do not mutilate the bodies of the dead nor rob them of their armor and weapons, and do not molest their women. Above all things, remember God at all times."

Ali redeployed his forces. He gave command of the right wing to Abdullah ibn Abbas, and of the left wing to Malik ibn Ashter, while he himself commanded the center. With him were the companions and the friends of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, among them Ammar ibn Yasir. Presently, the Syrians attacked, and Ali signaled his forces to repel them.

The battle of Siffin had begun.

Ammar ibn Yasir was past 70 at this time but the flame of faith in God, and the love of His Messenger, Muhammad, burned fiercely inside his breast, and he fought like young men. To add the dramatic touch to the battle, he carried the same weapons with which he had fought, many years earlier, in the company of Muhammad Mustafa, against the polytheists of Makkah in Badr.

The enemy Ammar met in Siffin, was disguised as a Muslim but he could not hoodwink him (Ammar). Ammar's penetrating eyes recognized the face behind the mask. He must have been intensely amused to meet the old enemy, after a lapse of many years, in a new encounter. For him the battle of Siffin was redolent of the battle of Badr. Once again he was fighting, on the side of Muhammad and his vicegerent, Ali, against their enemies. As he struck the Syrians, he kept saying:

"We are fighting against you today over the interpretation of Qur’an just as in the times of our Prophet, we fought against you over its revelation."

Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal in his Musnad, and Hakim in his Mustadrak, have reported on the authority of Abu Saeed al-Khudri, a companion, that the Apostle of God said to Ali:

"O Ali! just as I am fighting against the idolaters over the revelation of Qur'an, some day you will fight over its interpretation."

Ammar paused for a few moments to address his comrades-in-arms, and said to them:

"My friends! attack the enemy. There is no time to linger and to hesitate. The doors of Heaven are wide open today but to get admission to it, you have to dare the swords and the spears of these enemies of God and His Messenger. Charge at them. Break their swords, their spears, and their skulls, and you will enter the gates of bliss and eternal felicity, and there, you will be in the company of Muhammad, the Beloved of Allah Himself."

Ammar himself led the charge, and soon he was deep inside the ranks of the Syrians. In the midst of action, he felt thirsty, and was oppressed by heat. He returned to his lines to slake his thirst, and asked his aides to bring water for him. It so happened that just at that moment, they were unable to find water anywhere, but one of them found milk, and he presented a cup to him.

When Ammar saw the cup of milk before him, he felt a tremor of excitement run through him. His lips curled up in a broad smile, and he exclaimed: "Allah-o-Akbar (Mighty is the Lord). The Messenger of God could speak only the truth." The bystanders requested him to explain the meaning of his exclamation, and he said:

"The Messenger of God had told me that my last intake in this world would be milk. Now I know that the time for me to meet him has come. I had awaited this moment so long, so eagerly. It's here at last. Glory to Allah."

Ammar ibn Yasir was transfigured by the love of God and the love of His Apostle, Muhammad. He drank the milk, mounted his horse, and then plunged into the ranks of the Syrians. Suddenly, he spotted Amr bin Aas in their midst, and shouted:

"Curse on you, O flunky of Muawiya! you have sold your Faith in exchange for Egypt. Have you forgotten the prediction of the Messenger of God when he said that a group of evil men would kill me? Take heed and look again. Don't you recognize me? I am Ammar, Ammar ibn Yasir, the friend of Muhammad Mustafa."

Amr bin Aas had, of course, weighed all the options, and had decided in favor of Egypt. But he kept quiet, knowing that to open his mouth

would be to confess his guilt, and no matter what he said, he would only give himself away.

Ammar was taking his last ride on this earth. Soon he was going to enter Heaven where his friend and beloved, Muhammad, was awaiting him, ready to greet him, and to shake the dust of Siffin from his curly hair and radiant face just as many years earlier, he had shaken the dust of the Trench of Medina off his curly hair and radiant face.

Striking right and left, Ammar advanced, utterly oblivious of all danger to himself. His head and face were caked in blood and dust so that he could not be recognized. At that moment, a Syrian soldier, taking deadly aim, hurled a javelin at him which caught him in his heart, and he was unhorsed. In the act of falling from the horse, he exchanged his life for the Crown of Martyrdom and put it on his head. Wearing this glorious and luminous crown, Ammar ibn Yasir entered the company of the Immortals in Heaven, headed by his friend, Muhammad Mustafa, the Beloved of Allah.

Two Syrian knights came to see Muawiya. Each claimed that he had hurled the javelin that killed Ammar, and each was a candidate for a reward for his "exploit." Amr bin Aas was with Muawiya, and he asked them: "Why are both of you so eager to leap into the flames of hell?"

The historians and traditionalists have recorded the famous prediction of the Messenger of Allah that Ammar ibn Yasir would be killed by men of error.

Sir John Glubb

When the first Muslims in Medina were threatened by Quraish, whom they repelled by digging a ditch, Ammar ibn Yasir had been staggering along with a great load of earth. The Prophet himself had noticed him and came to his assistance, relieved him of his load and dusted his head and clothes. With that kindly paternal spirit which was one of the reasons for the devotion of his followers, he had said, "Poor Ammar! A cruel and unjust people will certainly be the death of you." It seems probable that the remark was made jokingly, blaming his companions for overworking the willing disciple. But the phrase was remembered as a prophecy. Now on the second day of the battle of Siffin, Ammar was killed fighting for Ali and calling aloud, "O Paradise, how close thou art." Such was the veneration entertained by both armies for the memory of the Apostle that the death of Ammar inspired as much ardor in the Army of Ali as it induced depression in that of Muawiya. For the implication of the prophecy was that the men who killed Ammar would be

fighting in an unjust cause. (The Great Arab Conquests, London, p. 326, 1963)

Sir John Glubb has erred in suggesting that the Apostle made the remark "jokingly." The Apostle was not joking. There was no occasion for a joke. He was deadly serious when he told Ammar that a cruel and unjust people would kill him.

Ammar's death had a profound effect upon both friend and foe, and it forced a tilt in perceptions. The Iraqis now fought with new zeal being convinced that they were fighting for Truth. At the same time, the Syrians were racked with doubt. Many of them stopped fighting, among them Amr bin Aas himself. His son, Abdullah, said to him:

"Today we have killed a man from whose face the Apostle of God himself had removed dust, and had told him that a band of evil men would kill him."

Amr bin Aas quoted the tradition of the Prophet before Muawiya, and said: "It is now obvious that we are the men who are in error."

Muawiya bade Amr to keep quiet, and not to let others hear the tradition of the Prophet, and he added that Ammar had actually been killed by Ali who had brought him into the battle.

One of the companions who was present in the entourage of Muawiya, warily commented upon his (Muawiya's) remark that if Ali had killed Ammar because he had brought him into the battle with him, then without a doubt, Muhammad had killed Hamza because he had taken him into battle with him.

When Ali heard that Ammar was killed in action, he recited the 156th verse of the 2nd chapter of Al-Qur’an al-Majid as follows:

We are for God, and toward Him is our return.

Ammar's death was a terrible shock to Ali. They had been friends since the days when Ammar and his parents were tortured by the Quraysh for accepting Islam, and their friend, Muhammad, comforted them. But Muhammad himself had, long since, parted company with them. Now Ammar also left this world, leaving Ali alone. Ali was overwhelmed by sorrow and by an awful feeling of "lonesomeness."

Ali and his friends said the funeral prayer for Ammar ibn Yasir, the friend of Allah, the companion of Muhammad, and the Martyr of Siffin, and gave him burial.

Just like his two friends, Muhammad and Ali, Ammar had also fought the Quraysh all his life. Earlier, the Quraysh had killed his parents, and now they killed him.

Each of the three Yasirs’ had won the crown of Martyrdom.

Ali's sorrow at Ammar's death was matched by Muawiya's exultation. The latter often said that Ammar was one of the two arms of Ali (the other arm being Malik ibn Ashter), and he boasted that he had severed that arm.

At the resumption of fighting, the two sons of Hudhaifa ibn al-Yaman, Saeed and Safwan, were killed in action by the Syrian troops. It was their father's last prayer that they would die fighting for Ali.

Many days passed in desultory warfare. It was in these skirmishes that Ali sustained two other heavy losses in the death of two companions of the Prophet. One of them was Khuzaima ibn Thabit Ansari (he whose one witness was equal to two witnesses of others); and Oways Qarni. The latter, as noted before, had arrived from Yemen, and had met Ali for the first time on the eve of the battle of Basra. The lifelong desire of Khuzaima and Oways Qarni was to win the status of martyrs in Islam. They won it in the battle of Siffin.

The death of Khuzaima and Oways Qarni so exasperated Ali that he sent word to Muawiya to come out and fight in person, and thereby save the lives of thousands of Muslims who were dying on both sides. Muawiya, of course, did not accept the invitation. It was plain to see that political sophistication and valor did not necessarily grow on the same tree.

Men were dying in large numbers but without any tangible results to show. Ali found this lack of progress detrimental to the morale of his troops, and he decided to remedy the situation. That evening he called Abdullah ibn Abbas who was his principal adviser, and Malik ibn Ashter who was his Chief of Staff, to a conference. Together they worked out a new strategy to bring the battle to a successful conclusion.

On the following day, Ali and Malik were to attack the enemy simultaneously, one from the right and the other from the left. Maintaining perfect coordination, synchronization and precision, they were to take the enemy in a pincer movement, and then converging upon his center, Malik was to lead the charge that would force him (the enemy) to surrender.

After the night prayer, Ali addressed his troops as follows:

"O Muslims! Tomorrow you will have to fight the decisive battle. Therefore, spend this night in devotions to your Creator. Seek His mercy, and pray that He gives you steadfastness and victory. And tomorrow prove to everyone that you are the champions of Justice and Truth." (Kamil ibn Athir, History, vol. III, p. 151)

The Battle of Layla-tul-Harir

Next morning, Ali and Malik mounted their horses, and rode in front of the Syrian army surveying its disposition. They made some minor changes in the plan of the battle, and then, upon a signal from Ali, Malik attacked the left wing of the enemy.

The Syrians enjoyed a numerical superiority over Malik, and their generals tried to make the best of it. Whenever he attacked, they gave in but somehow managed to regroup.

Malik fought all day long. Normally, the two armies stopped fighting after sunset, and returned to the camp for prayers and for rest but that day Malik refused to return. He also didn't let the Syrians return to their camp, and kept them in the battlefield.

After a brief pause for his prayers, Malik launched his blitz upon the Syrian army. This time his charge was so impetuous that the Syrians were driven before him like sheep. After the night prayer, Ali also returned to the battlefield, and attacked the right wing of the Syrians. Between them, they began to grind the Syrian army. They killed hundreds of Syrian warriors and spread terror and dismay in their ranks. The groans and screams of the Syrian wounded and the dying, the clangor of arms, the clash of steel, Malik's double-edged sword ripping through the Syrian armor, and his battle-cry of Allah-o-Akbar, filled the night sky of the desert.

Malik was, beyond all measure daring and intrepid. He did indeed seem in the presence of the enemy to be the very Genius of Victory. He was a special and a fatal instrument in the hands of the Providence. Wherever he rode, victory charged with him.

Edward Gibbon

In this sanguinary contest the lawful caliph displayed a superior character of valor and humanity. His troops were strictly enjoined to await the first onset of the enemy, to spare their flying brethren, and to respect the bodies of the dead, and the chastity of the female captives. He generously proposed to save the blood of the Moslems by a single combat; but his trembling rival declined the challenge as a sentence of inevitable death. The ranks of the Syrians were broken by the charge of a hero who was mounted on a piebald horse, and wielded with irresistible force his ponderous and two-edged sword. As often as he smote a rebel, he shouted Allah Akbar, 'God is Victorious!' and in the tumult of a nocturnal battle he was heard to repeat four hundred times that tremendous exclamation. (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

The hero who broke the ranks of the Syrians, was Malik. But already he had killed so many of them – the rank-and-file Syrians – that he began

to lose interest in them. He searched for quarry of a higher grade. In the battle of Basra, he had put an end to fighting by killing the camel which carried Ayesha on its back. His aim now was to kill or to capture Muawiya, and thus to put an end to the battle of Siffin. With the instinct of a hunter, therefore, he began to move toward his prey.

Malik rode through pools of blood and over high banks of the Syrian slain, irresistibly, inexorably and perhaps inevitably. Whoever challenged him or stood in his way, was cut into pieces.

Muawiya now could see with his own eyes that the crunch was coming. What he saw closing in on him, was not Malik, Ali's Chief of Staff, but the Angel of Death. The solid ground under his feet appeared to him to be turning into a quicksand. His bodyguards, though hand-picked for their bravery, strength and devotion to him and to his house, were powerless before Malik. They could not stop him from advancing toward his prey but they did the second best thing – they got fresh horses ready for him (for Muawiya) to mount and to escape from the battlefield under the cover of darkness.

In this dire distress, Muawiya turned to Amr bin Aas, and said:

"Is there any hope that we can still save our lives or this desolate plain is destined to become our graveyard? And incidentally, do you still want Egypt? If you do, then think at once of some stratagem to check Malik or else all of us including you, will be killed in the next few moments."

The instinct for survival was very strong in Amr bin Aas. He could rise equal to almost any occasion, and was, in fact, ready with a stratagem for this very moment. Amr's stratagem was going to wrest not only the prey but victory itself out of Malik's hand!

The battle that Malik was fighting, is famous in history as the "Battle of Layla-tul-Harir." It was the climax of the grim contest in the plain of Siffin on the bank of the Euphrates. It was also the high point of the political and military careers of both Ali and Malik, as events were very soon to show.

Ever since Ali had demanded the pledge of loyalty from Muawiya, he (Muawiya) had opened a psychological war against him. One of the weapons, he had used in his psychological warfare against Ali, was gold or the lure of gold. His mother, Hinda, had used sex as a weapon in her warfare against Islam in the battle of Uhud. With the weapon of gold, Muawiya had success – fully seduced many of the senior officers in the Iraqi army, and had dented their will-to-fight. He had not only loaded them with gold and silver but had also promised to appoint them as

governors of the provinces and commanders in his army if they betrayed Ali at the critical moment in the battle.

The critical moment had arrived. Malik's immense strokes had thrown the Syrians into hopeless disorder. Their only hope for their safety was in the darkness of the night which would or might conceal them from the sight of Malik.

Malik who figured that he was on the point of killing or capturing Muawiya and Amr bin Aas, did not know that both of them were in possession of a secret weapon which would save their lives and would baffle him. The secret weapon of Muawiya was already working silently and insidiously but effectively. It was the seed of treason that he had planted in the Iraqi army. The seed suddenly burgeoned in the battle of Layla-tul-Harir!

Malik was still clobbering the Syrian army savagely when Amr bin Aas ordered his soldiers to hoist copies of Qur’an on the points of their lances as a gesture of their wish to refer the dispute to the Judgment of God to be found in it.

Those officers in the Iraqi army who had been bought by Muawiya, and were ready to act their part, were awaiting a signal. As soon as they saw copies of Qur’an on the lances, they put their swords in the scabbards and stopped fighting, to the great surprise and consternation of Ali, Abdullah ibn Abbas, and the handful of their faithful officers. Just then, Abdullah ibn Abbas also caught sight of the spiked copies of Qur’an, and he understood what was afoot. His terse comment was:

"The battle is over; treachery has begun."

And so it was. Muawiya and Amr bin Aas had appealed to the arbitration of arms, and they had failed. They now appealed to treachery, and as events were soon to show, they were going to succeed! The first man in the Iraqi army who stopped fighting, was Ash'ath bin Qays, the same whose daughter, Jo’dah, was to kill Hasan ibn Ali with poison some years later. He was the ringleader of the traitors in the Iraqi army. He came to see Ali and said to him:

"The Syrians do not want to see any more bloodshed among the Muslims. They want the Book of God to be a judge between them and us. We, therefore, cannot fight against them any more."

The leaders of other tribes who were also in league with Muawiya, stopped fighting in imitation of Ash'ath bin Qays. The tribesmen followed the example of their leaders, and they too stopped fighting. Thus fighting came to a virtual halt over most of the front. Only one squadron

- the one led by Malik – was left in the field fighting and battering the Syrians.

It did not occur to the traitors in the Iraqi army that if Muawiya and Amr bin Aas had any respect for Qur'an, they would have invited it (the Iraqi army) to make the Word of God the Arbiter in their dispute before or even during the battle but they did not. They remembered Qur'an only when the defeat and the destruction of the Syrian army suddenly loomed before them over the horizon.

Ash'ath bin Qays was suddenly gripped with love for the lives of the Muslims. He seized a copy of Qur'an, stood facing his army, and shouted:

"O Muslims! Compel Ali to accept arbitration of the Book of God, and thereby put an end to this bloodshed."

The bloodshed of the Muslims alarmed Ash'ath only when he saw that Ali was on the point of winning the battle. Ali's victory, he knew, would not change anything for him. But in the event of Ali's failure, he was assured of rich rewards from Muawiya. His "anxiety" to save the lives of the Muslims, therefore, was understandable.

Presently, Ali was surrounded by the leaders of the tribes in his army, and they began to urge him to stop fighting against the Syrians, who, they said, at that very moment, were appealing to him, in the name of the Book of God, to stop killing the Muslims. Ali warned them that they were being duped by the enemy, and exhorted them to press their advantage to victory. He also told them that the appeal in the name of the Book of God was nothing but a ruse to deprive them of the fruits of their victory, and to escape defeat and death.

But Muawiya's gold and silver proved to be much more powerful argument than anything Ali could say. The traitors soon became insolent; they asked Ali to recall Malik from the battlefield, and to declare a cease-fire immediately. Ali hesitated but realized that he did not have much of a choice in the face of an impending mutiny in his own army, and sent a messenger to Malik calling him from the front-line. Malik had been so engrossed in grinding the remnants of the Syrian army that he had not even noticed that his own army was not fighting any more. He, therefore, told the messenger that it was no time for him to leave the battlefield, and to leave his job unfinished.

Malik was very soon going to find out that his ponderous and double-edged sword which had decimated the Syrian army, would become powerless against a new weapon forged by Muawiya and Amr bin Aas – the weapon of the double-cross!

When Muawiya's agents and hirelings in Ali's camp heard Malik's reply, they told him that if he (Malik) did not return from the battle immediately, they would seize him (Ali), and would deliver him into his (Muawiya's) hands. This time Ali had to send a signal of distress to Malik who was told that if he did not return to the camp at that very moment, he would not see his master any more.

Malik ground his teeth in anger as he could now see his quarry slip from his grasp. He came into the camp in a towering rage, raring to kill the traitors but sensed the danger to his master who was in their midst, and all of them had their hands at the hilts of their swords. When he sharply reproved them for their stupidity and treachery, they moved menacingly toward him with their drawn swords. But Ali interposed between them, and said to the traitors:

"You may not fight against your enemy but at least do not kill your own greatest friend."

Ali did not want Muawiya to see the in-fighting in his own camp.

The battle of Siffin was over. Where Muawiya's power had failed, his craft and guile had succeeded. Victory eluded Ali's grasp, and thenceforth he was to be on the defensive in a losing war against Muawiya. The cease-fire marked the beginning of his political decline.

After the cessation of hostilities, it was agreed that the civil war of the Muslims should be referred to arbitration, and the decision of the arbitrators should be accepted by all parties. It was clearly stipulated in these early negotiations that the arbitrators would make their decision only "in the light of the Book of God." Muawiya designated Amr bin Aas as the arbitrator representing his side; and the rebels in Ali's army proposed the name of Abu Musa al-Ash’ary to represent Iraq.

Abu Musa was a man who combined stupidity with questionable loyalty to Ali. He was soon to demonstrate both qualities, one of his head, and the other of his heart, in his encounter with Amr bin Aas for whom he was no match in anything, least of all in the subtleties of diplomacy and negotiation.

Ali instinctively rejected Abu Musa whom he had always found repulsive. His own choice was Abdullah ibn Abbas or Malik ibn Ashter. But both of them were acceptable neither to Muawiya nor to his agents in the Iraqi army like Ash'ath bin Qays and others. They said that they wanted an "impartial" and a "non-partisan" man such as Abu Musa was but Abdullah ibn Abbas and Malik ibn Ashter were not. Ali asked them: "If that is so, then why don't you raise objection to the designation of Amr bin Aas who is neither impartial nor non-partisan?" They replied

that they were responsible only for their own affairs, and not for the affairs of others.

Ali resisted the pressures of the traitors but they were all fattening on Muawiya's gold which they were not ready to forfeit at any price. It was, in fact, arranged beforehand that Abu Musa would represent Iraq. Eventually, the traitors succeeded in foisting the dim-wit Abu Musa upon their master as his "representative."

When the cease-fire agreement was being drafted, an incident occurred which harked back to Hudaybiyya. The secretary wrote the words: "This is an agreement between Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Chief of the Believers, and Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan… " Amr bin Aas, the representative of Muawiya, raised objection, and said: "Delete the words, 'the Chief of the Believers.' If we had acknowledged Ali as the Chief of the Believers, we would not be fighting against him." Thereupon, Ali remarked: "How true was the Apostle of God when he foretold this very incident. When the Treaty of Hudaybiyya was being drafted, and I had written the words, 'This is a Treaty between Muhammad, the Messenger of God, and … ' the idolaters interrupted me, and said that if they had acknowledged Muhammad as the Messenger of God, then they would not be fighting against him, and they insisted upon the deletion of the words, 'Messenger of God,' from the text of the Treaty."

At Hudaybiyya, Muhammad had deleted the words "Messenger of God" from the draft treaty; at Siffin, Ali, walking in his (Muhammad's) footsteps, allowed the words "the Chief of the Believers" to be deleted from the draft treaty. The cease-fire agreement was duly signed and witnessed by both sides, and copies were exchanged for preservation in the archives.

The terms of the cease-fire agreement were:

1. Both arbitrators would be subject to the rule that their decisions would be taken in the light of the Book of God. If they are unable to decide anything on this basis, then they would take their decision in the light of the precedents and traditions of the Messenger of God.

2. The decision of the arbitrators, if based upon the Book of God, would be binding on both sides.

3. The arbitrators would investigate the causes that led to the murder of Uthman, and the civil war of the Muslims (to suggest remedial action for future).

4. The arbitrators would publish their decisions within six months from the date of the cease-fire.

5. The belligerents would observe a truce. They would protect the arbitrators who would have complete freedom of movement in the country.

6. The arbitrators would meet at a place on the frontier between Iraq and Syria.

The most important clause in this agreement was that the arbitrators would make the Book of God their guide, and that they would not be governed by their own lusts and desires.

The Battle of Siffin was officially over but Malik ibn Ashter, now "the chained dragon of the Arabs," resolutely refused to witness the document of agreement. He considered it a document of infamy and iniquity.

R. A. Nicholson

A great battle was fought at Siffin, a village on the Euphrates. Ali had well-nigh gained the day when Muawiya bethought him of a stratagem. He ordered his troops to fix Korans on the points of their lances and to shout, "Here is the Book of God: Let it decide between us!" The miserable trick succeeded. In Ali's army there were many pious fanatics to whom the proposed arbitration by the Koran appealed with irresistible force. They now sprang forward clamorously, threatening to betray their leader unless he would submit his cause to the Book. Vainly did Ali remonstrate with the mutineers, and warn them of the trap into which they were driving him, and this too at the moment when victory was within their grasp. He had no choice but to yield and name as his umpire a man of doubtful loyalty, Abu Musa as-Ashari, one of the oldest surviving companions of the Prophet. Muawiya on his part named Amr bin al-Aas, whose cunning had prompted the decisive maneuver. (A Literary History of the Arabs, p. 192, 1969)

The two arbitrators, Abu Musa Ashari and Amr bin Aas, announced that they would meet, six months later, in Adhruh, to give their verdict in the dispute between the two parties. Ali and Muawiya then retired from Siffin to await the decision of the arbitrators.

When Ali returned to Kufa, he set to work to reorganize the government, but unfortunately, he was compelled to defer his plans because of the outbreak of a new rebellion in his army.

During the battle of Siffin, Muawiya had planted seeds of treason in the army of Iraq, as noted before. This he had done by making presents of gold and silver, and by making promises to grant lands, estates, and high civil and military ranks, to the key figures in Ali's army, in exchange for their support to him. His "investments" had paid off rich dividends to him. The recipients of his gifts had forced Ali to stop fighting

and to accept arbitration, and in this manner, he (Muawiya) had succeeded in dodging disaster and death at Siffin. They now sat expectantly, awaiting fulfillment, by Muawiya, of his promises.

But when Muawiya returned to Damascus, he felt that he could now afford to dispense with the services of most of his clients in Ali's army. He, therefore, told them that he did not promise them anything.

The clients realized that they had been tricked by Muawiya. In sheer chagrin and frustration, they turned to Ali, and asked him to repudiate the cease-fire agreement, and to resume fighting against Muawiya. But Ali refused to do this, and said that he had to wait and see if the decision of the arbitrators would be in conformity with the commandments in Qur’an or not before making any other move.

But the ex-clients of Muawiya did not want to wait. They pressed Ali to fight, and when he did not agree, they and their supporters left his army en masse, and broke their pledge of allegiance to him. There were 12,000 of these men who repudiated their oath of loyalty to Ali after the battle of Siffin. They are called Kharjis (Khawarij), and they gathered in a place called Harura from where they began to plunder the surrounding country, and to kill the innocent people, and in fact, everyone who disagreed with their views on government and politics.

Ali tried to persuade the Khawarij to return to Kufa, and to put before him the points of their disagreement with him. He answered all their questions and objections most satisfactorily, and some of them, being convinced that he was right, renewed their pledge of loyalty to him but many others did not. They now claimed that by agreeing to submit his dispute with Muawiya for arbitration by fallible human beings, instead of the Book of God, Ali had become an "apostate," and that his "repentance" along could bring salvation to him.

Ali tolerated the insolence and the impudence of the Khawarij in the hope that they would realize their error but this only made them more insolent and more impudent. Presently, their leaders decided to leave Kufa, and to set up their headquarters in some other place. They selected a village called Nehrwan for this purpose, and ordered all Kharjis to assemble there. From Nehrwan, the Khawarij spread terror in the country. They committed new excesses to cover their guilt, shame and remorse. They went around killing people indiscriminately, not sparing even women and children. Then news came that they were planning to attack Kufa itself.

Ali had to act immediately to check Kharji lawlessness and anarchy, and he went in person to Nehrwan to meet their leaders. He told them

that there was safe-conduct for all those among them who would leave their camp, return to their homes, and live in peace with their neighbors. Many of them realized that they had no reason to fight against Ali, and they left Nehrwan to go back to their homes. But a core of 4000 die-hards remained adamant in their demand that Ali had to "repent" before they would acknowledge him the leader of the Muslims. They, then raised their battle-cry "No one to govern except Allah," and attacked Ali's troops. Though they had attacked with reckless abandon, they didn't do much harm to Ali's troops. When the latter counter-attacked, the Khawarij were defeated; most of them were killed, and only a few escaped from the battlefield.

Though the Khawarij had adopted as their slogan the Qur'anic verse No one is to govern except Allah, they had neither the intention nor the ability to set up the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. They only wanted power for themselves They were an explosive mixture of terrorism, politics and religious fanaticism. In the event of their success, they would only have revived the tribal particularism of the pre-Islamic Arabs. To this day, they remain peculiarly unassimilated in the history of the Muslim people.

Dr. Hamid-ud-Din

The Kharjis prevented people from enlisting in Ali's army. And if anyone disagreed with their beliefs, they killed him on the spot. In this way, many Muslims were killed. Ali sent an emissary to dissuade them from committing crimes against innocent people but they killed him also.

The Kharji camp was at Nehrwan. Ali also led his army to Nehrwan. He asked the Khawarij to give up those men for trial and justice who had killed innocent Muslims. But they shouted with one voice that all of them had killed them, and that they considered the killing of such people (those Muslims who did not share their beliefs) a sacred duty. Ali once again pointed out their errors to them, and appealed to them to return to their homes but their response was negative.

At last, Ali sent Abu Ayub Ansari with the banner of Islam in the middle of the two opposing forces. Abu Ayub unfurled the banner, and announced that whoever from the Kharji camp would come beneath it, would be safe.

Many Kharjis realizing their error, came under the banner planted by Abu Ayub. But 4000 of their warriors still refused to leave their camp. They were determined to fight against Ali. They shouted, "No one to command except Allah," and then they attacked Ali's army. They fought with the courage of fanatics but were surrounded and defeated, and

nearly all of them perished. (History of Islam, Lahore, Pakistan, p. 202, 1971)

The battle-cry of the Kharjis, "No one to command except Allah," was only a gimmick, designed to take political power into their own hands, and to deny it to everyone else.

In the meantime, Amr bin Aas and Abu Musa al-Ashari, the two arbitrators, had completed their secret negotiations, and were ready to make an announcement. Both of them had agreed that it was in the interests of the Dar-ul-Islam that Ali and Muawiya both should abdicate or should be deposed, and the Muslim umma should select a new ruler for itself.

The arbitrators and their staff met in Adhruh. Four hundred men of each side also arrived at the scene, as per the terms of the cease-fire agreement. The Syrian delegation was led by Abul Awar Salmi, and the Iraqi delegation was led by Abdullah ibn Abbas and Shurayh ibn Hani.

Many other people also came to Adhruh to hear the verdict of the arbitrators on the fate of the Dar-ul-Islam. Among them were Abdullah bin Umar, Abdullah by Zubayr, Abdur Rahman bin Abu Bakr, Saad bin Abi Waqqas, and Mughira bin Shaaba.

Amr bin Aas told Abu Musa that he held him in very high esteem since he (Abu Musa) was not only a companion of the Apostle of God but also was a great scholar, and for this reason, he deferred to him in everything, and also for this reason, he (Abu Musa) ought to be the first to make the announcement of their joint decision, which he (Amr) would confirm later.

Abdullah ibn Abbas warned Abu Musa that Amr might try to outwit and outmaneuver him, and suggested that he should let him (Amr) be the first to make the announcement. But Abu Musa did not pay heed to this advice of sagacity, and said:

"The case is airtight and there is no room in it for Amr bin Aas to maneuver or to score."

Abu Musa had been utterly carried away by the show of "deference" made by Amr bin Aas to him. He then went into the pulpit to make the historic announcement, and said:

"O Muslims! Much sorrow and travail have been visited upon the umma of Muhammad by the wars of Ali and Muawiya. Therefore, both of us have decided to depose both of them, and we have agreed that the right of choosing a new khalifa should be given to the Muslim umma itself - to all of you."

The Iraqi delegation was mortified to hear this announcement but decided, nevertheless, to hear what the other arbitrator had to say.

Abu Musa sat down after making his announcement, and then Amr bin Aas rose to make his announcement. He said:

"O Muslims! All of you have just heard what Abu Musa said regarding the deposition of Ali. He has deposed Ali as khalifa. I uphold his decision, and declare that Ali is desposed as khalifa. And in Ali's place, I appoint Muawiya as your new khalifa… "

Amr bin Aas had not concluded his remarks yet when there was an uproar of outrage. Abu Musa screamed in confusion and fury: "Liar! I never said this. You are the most brazen liar. You are a dog which is loaded with books and which pants and puts out its tongue when under the load." Amr rose equal to the occasion, and returned the compliments by saying: "You are a donkey which is loaded with books, and which brays aloud when under a heavy load."

The "dog" and the "donkey" snapped, snarled and glowered for a few moments, and then attacked each other fiercely. They bit and kicked each other, and they "barked" and "brayed" in the midst of pandemonium until they were hoarse. There was laughter too, though at the expense of Abu Musa alone.

After six months of in camera deliberations, the only "fare" that the arbitrators – Amr bin Aas and Abu Musa had prepared for the "edification" of the hundreds of Muslims who had flocked to Adhruh for the "feast," was "music" which was provided by the first of them by "barking," and by the second, by "braying."

The "concert" was, at last, over, and the Muslims who had come from distant places, left Adhruh to return to their homes.

Abu Musa realized that he had become the laughing stock of all Arabs, and he fled to Yemen to hide his shame. He was a man of rather modest abilities but a coincidence of events had put him in a position where he perhaps assumed that he was in control of the destiny of the Muslim umma. His conceit was in conflict with prudence, and conceit won. The job he was called upon to handle, was just too big for someone so handicapped by lack of ability as he was, and he botched it. He was one of the confidantes of Umar bin al-Khattab who had appointed him governor, first of Basra and then of Kufa.

The threat to Muawiya had passed forever, and in his struggle to seize the khilafat, the initiative had now passed to him. His claim to khilafat rested upon the judgment that Amr bin Aas, the "king-maker," gave in Adhruh.

Amr's judgment was a piece of political legerdemain that would have thrilled Machiavelli; but for the Syrians, it had the authority of a fiat from heaven itself, and was, therefore, irreversible.

R. A. Nicholson

It is characteristic of Arabian notions of morality that this impudent fraud was hailed by Muawiya's adherents as a diplomatic triumph which gave him a colorable pretext for assuming the title of caliph. (A Literary History of the Arabs, p.192-193, 1969)

The arbitration turned out to be a farce and a fiasco. Its decision, at any rate, had been ultra vires. No one had given the arbitrators a mandate to pronounce judgment upon the caliphate or to depose or to appoint a caliph. Muawiya's supporters were seeking vengeance for the murder of Uthman. Muawiya had convinced them that Ali was responsible for the death of Uthman, and it was for this reason that they had fought at Siffin. They did not wage a war against Ali to enthrone Muawiya.

But the arbitrators did not investigate the origins of the civil war. They talked only about the caliphate even though it was not the matter in dispute. Their only duty was to find out who had killed Uthman, and if Muawiya had the right to seek vengeance for the crime.

Abu Musa gave his "Jovian" verdict by "deposing" Muawiya. What did the "deposition" of Muawiya mean anyway? And what did he (Abu Musa) depose him (Muawiya) from? Muawiya was not the khalifa, nor had anyone proposed his name for khilafat. On the other hand, Ali was the lawful khalifa of the Muslims. He was elected by consensus of the Muhajireen and the Ansar, and all parts of the empire, with the solitary exception of Syria, had acknowledged him their sovereign.

As arbitrators, or rather, as king-makers, Amr bin Aas and Abu Musa had engaged in long discussions on politics and war, and perhaps on the future of the Muslim umma but one thing they had not done was to consult Al-Qur'an al-Majid. They had kept Qur'an out of their deliberations in Adhruh just as, many years earlier, their forerunners in king-making, had kept Qur'an out of their deliberations in the outhouse of Saqifa in Medina.

By a strange "coincidence," all the king-makers of the Arabs, whether in Saqifa, or in the Electoral Committee of Abdur Rahman bin Auf, or in Adhruh, showed themselves "allergic" to Al-Qur'an al-Majid. Or, was it the other way round – Al-Qur'an al-Majid showing itself "allergic" to the king-makers? The king-makers kept Qur'an out of their deliberations or Qur'an itself stayed out of them – either way, it was truly one of the most fantastic "coincidences" in the history of the Muslims. For some

mysterious reason, all the king-makers on the one hand, and Al-Qur'an al-Majid on the other, remained apart and distant from each other.

Amr bin Aas and Abu Musa had to make Qur'an their guide in arbitration. They had a commitment to formulate their decisions in the light of the commandments of the Book of God. The commandment of God in this regard is clear-cut.

O you who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Apostle, and those charged with authority among you. If you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Apostle, if you do believe in Allah and the last day: that is best, and most suitable for final determination. (Chapter 4; verse 59)

The arbitrators, it appears, forgot both the commandment of God quoted in the foregoing verse, and their own commitment. But Qur'an did not forget them, and pointed out what they had done or what they had failed to do, in the following verse:

They are invited to the Book of God, to settle their disputes, but a party of them turns back and declines. (Chapter 3; verse 23)

Amr bin Aas and Abu Musa – the arbitrators made themselves a party of those who turn back from the Book of God. They had preferred to be guided by their own lusts, and for this reason, they invited the judgment of Qur'an upon themselves:

And if any do fail to judge by (the light of) what God hath revealed, they are (no better than) unbelievers. (Chapter 5; verse 47)

In the battle of Siffin, the armies of Iraq and Syria faced each other for 110 days. There were 90 engagements between them in which 25,000 Iraqis and 45,000 Syrians were killed.

This ghastly battle was the product of the ambition and the lust for power of Muawiya and Amr bin Aas. Muawiya was the governor of Syria, and was averse to nothing so much as to losing that position. Amr bin Aas was governor of Egypt but had been sacked by Uthman, and was dying to regain his old position. To retain or to regain their positions, both of them were willing to do anything and to pay any price Truth and Justice did not mean anything to them. They could deluge the Dar-ul-Islam with falsehood, and with the blood of the Muslims to realize their own wishes and ambitions.

The "triumvirs" of Basra (the Companions of the Camel), and Muawiya and Amr bin Aas recognized their great opportunity in the murder of Uthman, and they seized it. Vengeance for his blood was the thin veneer which imparted respectability to their naked lust for power. Uthman – dead was far more valuable to them than Uthman – alive. Therefore,

they gave him all the assistance they could – to be dead. But once he was dead, it became lawful, in fact, it became a duty, for them to commit mass murder in the name of seeking vengeance for his assassination.

The battles of Basra and Siffin were the mass murder of the Muslims dictated by the logic of "Realpolitik."

Toynbee says that Muhammad and Ali were no match for the merchant princes of Makkah (the Umayyads) in realpolitik. In a sense, he may be right. Muhammad and Ali hesitated to kill even an idolater, not to speak of killing a Muslim. They could not kill anyone for the sake of material power. They were, therefore, handicapped in their "competition" with the Umayyads.

Chapter 65

The Death of Malik al-Ashtar and the Loss of Egypt

ALI'S GOVERNOR IN EGYPT WAS MUHAMMAD IBN ABU BAKR. In 658 (38 A.H.) Muawiya sent Amr bin Aas with an army of 6000 warriors to conquer Egypt for him. Muhammad requested Ali to send him aid to defend Egypt. Ali realized that the only man who could save Egypt from the clutches of Muawiya and Amr bin Aas, was Malik ibn Ashter. He, therefore, sent him (Malik) as the new governor of Egypt, and recalled Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr to Kufa.

But neither Malik nor Muhammad ever reached their destinations. Malik left Kufa to take charge of Egypt. But Muawiya's agents, disguised as inn-keepers, were waiting to "greet" him at the frontier. They administered poison to him in his drink, and he died from its effect (Abul Fida).

Malik was Muawiya's nemesis.

The agent who had administered poison to Malik, immediately reported his "exploit" to Muawiya, and he (Muawiya) couldn't believe his own good fortune. In an ecstasy of delight, he exclaimed: "Today Ali has lost his second arm." By killing Ammar ibn Yasir, in the battle of Siffin, Muawiya had cut Ali's one arm; and now by killing Malik, he had cut his (Ali's) other arm also. After the death of Malik, Ali had lost both arms. Muawiya had "cut" Ali's arm with the aid of his secret but powerful weapon – poison!

Poison "dissolved" Muawiya's nemesis, and freed him from fear for all time.

Francesco Gabrieli

In those years Amr bin al-Aas reconquered Egypt for the Omayyads, eliminating through poison, Malik al-Ashter whom Ali had dispatched there as governor. (The Arabs, A Compact History, p. 69, 1963)

To Ali, the death of Malik, was a staggering blow. If ever there was a man in Arabia who was a one-man army, it was Malik. His presence

inspired confidence in his own army, and his name struck terror in the hearts of his enemies. The Arabs never produced a more formidable swordsman than him. By dint of grit and ability, he propelled himself to the top of the tree. It is one of the tragedies of the history of the Muslims that his career was cut short in the prime of life. He was brave, resolute, intelligent, chivalrous and faithful. There were many men who, until the death of Ammar ibn Yasir, were undecided if they should or should not fight on Ali's side. It was only after the fulfillment of the prediction of the Apostle of God that Ammar would be killed by the people of iniquity, that they were convinced that justice and truth were on Ali's side. But Malik never had such hang-ups. He knew that Ali and Truth were inseparable, and he was most consistent in his devotion and support to him.

Some historians have insinuated that Malik was one of those men who were implicated in Uthman's death. It is true that Malik came from Kufa to Medina with a delegation but he did not come to kill Uthman. He came only to request Uthman to remove a foul and a corrupt governor. He was the most gallant man in Arabia, and one thing he could not do was to kill an old man of 84. Malik, in fact, did not even enter Uthman's palace at any time. If he had, Naila (Uthman's wife) would have volunteered this information when Ali was interrogating witnesses of the crime; and Marwan would have broadcast the news of the intrusion to the whole world. But he never did.

The allegation that Malik was one of the murderers of Uthman, was cooked up by Muawiya. He was churning out new ideas at all times. In the battle of Siffin, when he saw Malik charging at his bodyguards, he screamed in terror and panic: "O save me from Malik; he is the one who killed Uthman." Muawiya knew that Malik had not killed Uthman but he also knew that the Syrians loved him (Uthman) and would fall like demons upon his (Uthman's) murderer if they could find him. In calling Malik the murderer of Uthman, he hoped to rouse the Syrians to make a superhuman effort to check his (Malik's) advance, and thus to save his own (Muawiya's) life. The court historians of Damascus took up the cry from Muawiya, and since then, the falsehood has been passing from generation to generation.

It is one of the ironies of the history of the Muslims that though Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr openly instigated the people to kill Uthman, they have never been impeached in its tribunal. And what was there to prevent Muawiya himself from going to Medina to save his (Uthman's) life? Nothing! But he never did. He withheld his aid on purpose, and let Uthman die. But after his death, he made an alliance, in exchange for Egypt,

with Amr bin Aas, to "seek vengeance for Uthman's murder." As noted before, Amr was one of the most implacable enemies of Uthman, and probably was his real murderer.

The scenario changed after the death of Uthman. First Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr, and then Muawiya and Amr bin Aas rose as his (Uthman's) protagonists to seek vengeance for his blood. Whatever the various and often murky impulses of those men and women who rallied round the corpse of Uthman, it is clear that his safety was not the least of their concerns. This is a fact that cannot be controverted but it's also a fact that Sunni historians do not wish to rake up. It is much more comforting and easier for them to allege that Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr or Malik ibn Ashter were involved in the assassination of Uthman than to admit that Ayesha, Talha, Zubayr, Muawiya and Amr bin Aas, all played a role in the grisly tragedy of the old khalifa's death.

Malik ibn Ashter died at a time when Ali needed him most, and there was no one who could take his place.

The shock to Ali, of the death of friends like Ammar ibn Yasir and Malik ibn Ashter, was devastating but he was sustained by his Faith. He considered each new shock, each new sorrow, and each new misfortune, a new test of his faith, and it remained unshaken. His faith in the mercy of his Creator was greater than anything that could ever befall him, and he never surrendered to despair.

Malik was truly extraordinary. He was the consummate military professional, dedicated, dignified, and supremely competent and self-confident. He was a king among men.

A more remarkable man than him in his bold and salient individuality, and sharply marked light and shadow, is nowhere to be seen in Arabian history. Propaganda has made the names of some other men more well-known than his but he remains incomparable. He was the Phoenix of Islam.

Perhaps it is impossible to pay Malik ibn Ashter a tribute greater than the one paid to him by his own master, Ali ibn Abi Talib. In the battle of Layla-tul-Harir, Ali placed his hands on the shoulders of Malik, and said:

"You have served me with the same distinction and devotion with which I served my master, Muhammad, the blessed Apostle of God."

The Loss of Egypt

Amr bin Aas entered Egypt without any opposition, and when he encountered Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr, he easily defeated him. Muhammad had no army, and he tried to fight with a handful of

soldiers. The Syrians captured him, and tortured him to death. Amr occupied Egypt, and it became a part of Muawiya's dominions.

Ali loved Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr as his own son. His death was another terrible shock he had to endure. He prayed for him, and invoked God's blessings and mercy upon his noble soul.

In 659 Muawiya stepped up his war of nerves against Ali, and sent several contingents into Jazirah and Hijaz to terrify people, and to destroy their morale. His policy at first was to strike a spark of terror and then to let the fire do the rest but his captains soon changed it into a phantasmagoria of violence and death. In Jazirah, Ne'man bin Bashir attacked Ain-at-Tamar with 2000 men; Sufyan bin Auf attacked Anbar and Madaen with 6000 soldiers; Abdullah bin Masadah Fizari attacked Tima with a force of 1700 freebooters; and Zahhak bin Qays and his followers laid waste the township of Waqsa. They killed all those men, women and children whom they suspected to be friendly to Ali, and they plundered the public treasury wherever they found one.

Dr. Hamid-ud-Din

The acquisition of Egypt immeasurably strengthened Muawiya's hands. He then sent units of his army into Hijaz, Jazirah and Iraq. They went around plundering, spreading terror and killing. Muawiya attacked the banks of the Tigris in person, and seized the public treasury in Jazirah. (History of Islam, Lahore, Pakistan, p. 204, 1971)

Muawiya and his generals had adopted a policy of waging irregular warfare against the successor of the Prophet of Islam and the sovereign of all Muslims. To them irregular warfare meant unconventional warfare; limited conventional military actions, and unlimited terrorism. They plunged the Dar-ul-Islam into a trauma from which it has never recovered.

In 660, Muawiya sent Bisr bin Artat with 3000 soldiers to Hijaz and Yemen on a rampage of pillaging, destroying, burning and killing. In Yemen, Bisr killed with his own hands, the infant twins of Obaidullah ibn Abbas who was the governor of that province. When he returned to Syria, gorged on innocent blood, tens of thousands of Muslims had been killed.

One of the governors of Ali in a frontier district, was Kumayl ibn Ziyad. He sought his master's permission to raid Syria. Such raids into Syria, he said, would compel Muawiya to halt his own raids into Hijaz and Iraq. But his application drew forth a characteristic reply from Ali who wrote to him:

"I hardly expected you to suggest that we raid the towns and villages in Syria. It is true that the Syrians are our enemies but they are also human beings, and what's more, they are Muslims. If we send raiding parties into Syria, it is most probable that the victims of our punitive action will not be the Syrian marauders who violate our borders but the Syrian civil population - the non-combatant folks. Is it therefore right and fair to plunder and to kill them for the crimes they did not commit? No. They will not pay the penalty for the crimes of their leaders. The best thing for us to do, therefore, is to strengthen our own defenses against the enemy, and to rout him before he can do any harm to our people."

The dominant logic of "mirror image" of matching terror with terror did not appeal to Ali; he considered is basically fallacious.

Though Ali drove the intruders out of his dominions, law and order had broken down. The Syrians began to violate the frontier with growing frequency. Bisr bin Artat defeated the small garrison defending the strategic town of Anbar and occupied it. He then put the whole population to the sword as was customary with him.

Ali called upon the Iraqis to stand up in defense of their homes against the Syrians but found them unresponsive. In winter they said that it was too cold to go on a campaign, and in summer they said that it was too hot. Many Iraqi leaders were still working for Muwaiya in return for his gifts and promises, and they spread disaffection in the country. Muawiya also worked hard to undermine the allegiance to Ali of the Iraqi army. For him, conflict was not limited to the operation of armies, but was carried on behind the front by his agents and partisans, by subversion and sabotage, and by propaganda and indoctrination.

Since there was no punitive action against them, the Syrian marauders were emboldened to penetrate deeper and deeper into Iraq.

Ali made many attempts to shake the Iraqis out of their lethargy and supineness but they acted as if the Syrian raids were not hurting them. Their head-in-the-sand attitude so exasperated him that he told them that if they did not obey his orders, and take up arms to defend their borders, he would abandon them in Kufa, and with the handful of loyal followers he still had with him, would go and try to stop the enemy, regardless of the consequences.

This threat appears to have worked. The Iraqis suddenly realized that if Ali abandoned them, they would be left leaderless. They, therefore, assured him that they would obey him - in peace and in war.

Ali immediately set to work to reorganize the army, and to mobilize fresh troops. He summoned Abdullah ibn Abbas from Basra, and he

ordered other leaders and their troops to assemble in the camp at Nukhayla near Kufa.

Ali had plunged into work to make up for time already lost through the earlier tardiness of the Iraqis in obeying his orders. But this new spurt of energy alarmed his enemies, and they plunged into intrigue to forestall him.

Ali had completed his preparations for an invasion of Syria but just when he was giving finishing touches to his logistical plans, he was assassinated in the Great Mosque of Kufa at the dawn of Ramadan 19 of 40 A.H. (January 27, 661).

Chapter 66

The Assassination of Ali

FROM THE SECOND HALF OF 658, MUAWIYA, the governor of Syria, had been steadily escalating violence against the dominions of Ali. Some of his inroads reached Ain-at-Tamar and Anbar, only 170 miles north of Kufa. The men of Kufa were so unwilling to fight against the Syrians that Ali found it impossible to take effective punitive action. Muawiya himself led a raid right across the Jazira from Raqqa to Mosul, and met no resistance anywhere. At last, Ali declared in the mosque of Kufa that he would leave the city with the few of his faithful followers in an attempt to halt the Syrian aggression against Iraq, even if it cost him his life. This threat awakened the citizens of Kufa to the specter of being left leaderless if Ali was killed fighting against the Syrians. They were stung into action and they began to mobilize for defense.

The battle of Siffin had been the first trial of strength between Ali and Muawiya. Militarily, the battle had been a near-victory for Ali, but politically, it had become a stalemate. After some time, it began to appear that Ali would take up the challenge of Muawiya. But just then Ali was assassinated in the mosque of Kufa, and the second trial of strength never took place.

According to the historical accounts some of which are quite plausible, three Kharjis met in Kufa (some say in Makkah) to hatch a conspiracy. Each of them volunteered to kill each of the three leading political figures of the Dar-ul-Islam – Ali, Muawiya and Amr bin Aas. By killing them, it is alleged, they hoped to put an end to civil wars in Islam, and to restore peace to the Muslim umma.

One of the three conspirators was a certain Abdur Rahman bin Muljam. He stayed in Kufa to kill Ali, and the other two went to Syria and Egypt to kill Muawiya and Amr bin Aas. The plans of the would-be assassins of Muawiya and Amr bin Aas, according to the stories in circulation, went awry, and they were captured and were executed.

The Kharjis had been defeated at Nehrwan, and most of them had perished in the battle but a few had escaped. Abdur Rahman bin Muljam was one of those who had escaped. He was consumed with the desire to kill Ali, and was in quest of an opportunity to do so. By a coincidence, he met a Kharji woman, one Qattama, whose father and brothers had also been killed in Nehrwan, and she too had nursed an undying hatred of Ali.

Abdur Rahman fell in love with Qattama, and proposed marriage to her. She told him that the price of her hand was the head of Ali ibn Abi Talib. This only strengthened Abdur Rahman in his resolution. He promised his inamorata the moon if she asked for it, but she said that nothing was of interest to her if she could not get the head of Ali ibn Abi Talib!

Abdur Rahman bin Muljam carefully worked out his plans to kill Ali. A few other trusted Kharjis also volunteered their services to him, and together they rehearsed the assassination. Abdur Rahman bin Muljam took one extra precaution – he put his sword in deadly poison, and let it soak in it for three days.

On the morning of the 19th of Ramadan of the year 40 A.H., Ali came into the Great Mosque of Kufa, and called Adhan (the call to prayer). He took his place in the alcove, and moments later, the worshippers began to arrive. They stood behind him in serried ranks, and the prayer began. Standing in the front row, with other worshippers, were Abdur Rahman bin Muljam and his confederates. They were watching Ali's movements. In the folds of their cloaks, they were carrying swords burnished to a high sheen, and soaked in poison.

Just when Ali touched the ground with his forehead for sajda, Abdur Rahman bin Muljam stepped out of his row, and crept into the alcove. And just when Ali lifted his head from the ground, ibn Muljam struck the fatal blow at his forehead with such deadly force that it split open.

Blood squirted from Ali's forehead in several jets, and he exclaimed:

"By the Lord of the Kaaba, I am successful!"

The members of the congregation realized what had happened, and as soon as they concluded the prayer, they surrounded him. His sons, Hasan and Husain, carried him to his house. A physician came, and tried to dress the ghastly wound but could not stop the bleeding. The blow of the sword was fatal anyway, but the poison from its blade was also spreading rapidly in his body. The Arab historians say that it was the second time that Ali was wounded in the forehead, the first time being when, in the battle of the Trench fought in 627, the sword of Amr bin Abd Wudd

cut through his shield and helmet, and struck it. His forehead still bore the scar left by the sword of Amr.

This is the account left by the Arab historians of the assassination of Ali, and it has been accepted as authentic by the vast majority of the Muslims.

Though this account has the authority of "consensus" of the historians behind it, its authenticity, nevertheless, is suspect on the grounds of "circumstantial evidence." There are too many "coincidences" in it.

No one questions the fact that it was Ibn Muljam who killed Ali. But was it his own idea to kill him? It is quite probable that the idea was planted in his mind by someone else who used subliminal techniques for doing so. Ibn Muljam didn't know that he was only a cat's paw, and he went ahead and killed Ali.

At this time no one in Dar-ul-Islam was more interested in the assassination of Ali than Muawiya. The plot to kill Ali, the skill displayed in its execution, and its success, show the touch of consummate subtlety and a high degree of professionalism which were characteristic of Muawiya alone, whereas Ibn Muljam was nothing more than a bumpkin. Muawiya employed the same "skill" in removing from the scene, real or fancied threats to his own security and power, on numerous other occasions in later times, with the same results.

Muawiya's spies had informed him that Ali was making preparations for the invasion of Syria. In the battle of Siffin, Muawiya had not responded to chivalrous treatment by Ali. This time, therefore, Ali had decided, not to fight a lingering action but a swift one that would quell Muawiya's rebellion, and would restore peace to the embattled empire of the Muslims. Muawiya also knew that Ali had, this time, both the ability and the resolution, to bring the conflict to a speedy and successful conclusion. His only hope, therefore, for his safety in future, as in the past, lay in the succor that he could get from his old and trusted "allies" – treachery and intrigue. He, therefore, mobilized them, and they didn't disappoint him.

Muawiya made the act of the assassination of Ali look absolutely spontaneous and convincing by making himself and his crony, Amr bin Aas, the potential and intended "victims" of the conspiracy and fanaticism of the Kharji anarchists. But both of them "escaped" assassination by a rare "stroke of good luck." One of them "fell ill" on the day he was to be "assassinated," and did not go into the mosque; the other did not fall ill, but went into the mosque wearing his armor under his cloak. He was "attacked" by his "assassin" but was "saved" by his armor. "Falling ill"

would have been an indiscreet act, and would have exposed both "victims." In this manner, "illness" and the armor "saved" both Muawiya and Amr bin Aas from the daggers of their Kharji "assassins."

But Ali was not so "lucky." He did not fall ill, and he did not put on his armor when entering the mosque. In the mosque, Ibn Muljam was awaiting him with a sword soaked in poison. When Ali rose from sajda, he struck at his forehead, and cleft it. The blow proved to be fatal.

Most of the Arab historians wrote histories which were "inspired" by Muawiya and his successors. He was of course free to inject any account into those histories. He, therefore, managed to save himself and Amr bin Aas from the indictment of history, and it was Ibn Muljam alone who went down in history books as the real and the only villain of the crime.

By a coincidence, the assassination of Ali took place on the eve of his invasion of Syria.

Though the Kharji anarchists had aimed their daggers at all three of the leading political figures of the Muslim world, viz., Ali, Muawiya and Amr bin Aas, by a coincidence, the latter two escaped the attempts on their lives, and Ali alone was killed.

By still another coincidence, the two men who escaped, i.e., Muawiya and Amr bin Aas, were intimate friends of each other, and both of them were – coincidence again – the mortal enemies of the third, i.e., Ali, who was the only one to be killed.

There are too many mysterious coincidences that saved the lives of Muawiya and Amr bin Aas but took the life of Ali.

Ali spent the time still left to him in prayer and devotions; in dictating his will; in giving instructions to his sons, ministers and generals regarding the conduct of the government; and in urging them all never to forget the old, the sick, the poor, the widows and the orphans at any time.

Ali declared that his elder son, Hasan, would succeed him as the head of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, and as the sovereign of all Muslims.

Though Ali was steadily weakening from the loss of blood and from the action of poison, all his faculties were sharp and clear right to the last moment. To all those people who came to see him, he said that they ought to be aware, at all times, of the presence of their Creator in their lives, to love Him, to serve Him, and to serve His Creation.

The poison had done its work, and on the morning of the 21st of Ramadan of 40 A.H., Ali ibn Abi Talib left this world to go into the presence of his Creator whom he had loved and served all his life. He was "God-intoxicated." His greatest ambition in life was to wait upon his Creator, every moment of his existence, and he realized it, and this is the

meaning of his exclamation in the alcove of the mosque when he felt the edge of the sword at his forehead: "By the Lord of the Kaaba, I am successful."

Hasan and Husain washed the body of their father, draped it in a shroud, offered the funeral prayers for it, and then buried it silently at midnight at Najaf Ashraf, at some distance from Kufa. No markings were placed on the grave, and the grave-site was kept a secret, as desired by Ali himself.

Ali, Islam's greatest saint, hero, statesman, philosopher and martyr, had left this world, and the world was not to find a man sublime like him to all eternity.

Many among the Muslims were the mourners of Ali's death but none mourned him more dolorously than the Dhimmis (the Jews, the Christians, and the Magians). They were utterly heart-broken. And when the sick, the disabled, the cripples, the orphans and the widows in the empire heard that he had died, they felt that their world had collapsed. He had been a father to them all. He had taken them all by the hand. He had taken them all into his prayers. Many among them did not know until after his death that it was he who had fed them and had taken care of them. He had taken all mankind into his grasp.

Whereas Ali was accessible at all times to the poor and the weak, his own greatest anxiety and fear were lest any of them be inaccessible to him. It was only in his dominion that the Dhimmis (non-Muslims), the powerless and the defenseless enjoyed complete security. No one could terrorize them or exploit them. With his death, their security was gone forever!

It is a truism that exercise of power cannot be combined with saintly purity, since once a man assumes responsibility for public affairs, the moral simplicities within which it is just possible, with luck, to be able to lead a private life, are soon hideously complicated to an extent that precludes all clear distinctions between right and wrong. This truism, however, has its own exception – in Ali. He upheld principle, in public life as in private, regardless of cost. He invariably put the right thing ahead of the smart thing, regardless of cost. The source of the principles which guided his private and public life, was Al-Qur’an al-Majid as it was also the source of his political philosophy.

Ali has many critics and enemies but they cannot point out a single instance when he deviated from a principle. They cannot point out any conflict between his thought and speech on the one hand, or between his

speech and deed on the other. He was consistently consistent in thought, speech and action.

Ali represented the ultimate triumph of character and ideology. He was a rare combination of love of God, devotion to duty, strength tempered with tenderness, symmetry of disposition, and inflexible integrity. His greatest legacy to the world of Islam will remain forever his sublime character.

Chapter 67

Some Reflections on Ali's Caliphate

WHEN IN 656 THE MUSLIMS ACKNOWLEDGED ALI AS THEIR CALIPH, and gave him their pledge of allegiance, religious and temporal authority were combined in one person. They thus "endorsed" an arrangement which had been made, as early as 632, by the Messenger of God himself for his succession.

There is no commandment in Islam, major or minor, doctrinal or formal, which has been left to the whims or the wishes or the votes of the masses. The most important political institution in Islam is the caliphate. It is important because the existence of the Muslim community and the survival of Islam depend upon it. It would, therefore, be unthinkable that it would be left to the whims or the wishes or the votes of the street crowds.

Law in Islam is the expression not of man's will but of God's.

After the death of Muhammad, Ali did not have any political power but he was still his successor. Whether or not he had power in his hands, obedience was due to him as the successor of the Prophet of Islam. The only thing that changed, after Ali's election, was that those people who had withheld their obedience to him in the past, now gave it to him, voluntarily.

Of those Muslims who took the oath of loyalty to Ali, there were two groups. Both groups took the oath of loyalty to him but for different reasons. The first group knew him to be the head of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth; the second group acknowledged him only as the Chief Executive of the government of the Muslims. The first group knew that Muhammad himself had designated him as the leader of the Muslim umma, and it knew that it was not free to take the oath of

loyalty to anyone else. The second group, however, would have given its pledge of loyalty to anyone who would have succeeded in seizing power.

Muhammad was not only a teacher and an ideal leader but was also the pioneer of a new age on earth for all mankind. He opened the gates of a new age, introduced into history a new force called Islam, let loose in the world a new dynamic that can, and does, and will, change human life and transform human relationships. He was the "pioneer" of all those men and women who seek the salvation of all mankind.

The basic aim of Muhammad was to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, i.e., the Government of Islam. He taught mankind the lesson of Tauheed (the doctrine of the Oneness of the Creator), and he invited it to acknowledge His paramountcy. He promulgated God's laws, enforced them, and created a society the hallmark of which was purity. In that society there was the reign of justice, knowledge and enlightenment, and he eliminated exploitation, tyranny, ignorance and superstition from it. Islam, the only monotheistic religion that represents a complete socio-economic-political system, is inherently hostile to all secular governments, especially those that adopt alien values which are repugnant to the value-system of Islam.

The establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth was the first part of the mission of Muhammad. The second part of his mission was to assure its continuity. He did not establish the "Kingdom" only for his own lifetime but for all time, and not only for the Arabs but for all mankind. He, therefore, designated as his successor a man he knew would give continuity to his work. Such a man was Ali ibn Abi Talib, as noted before.

Chapter 68

Ali's Internal and External and Internal Policy

Internal Policy

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT AIMS OF ISLAM was to restrain the strong from oppressing the weak, and to put an end to exploitation in all its forms. When Ali took charge of the caliphate, he dismissed the governors who had been appointed by Uthman. He was told that it would not be expedient to do so, and that he ought to consolidate his own position before dismissing them. But his reply to these suggestions was:

"O Muslims! Do you wish that I should make an alliance with cruelty, tyranny, treachery and perfidy? Do you wish that I should become an accomplice in the exploitation of the umma of Muhammad? By God, I shall never do so as long as the heavenly orbs are pulling each other. I shall wrest from the hands of the usurper the rights of the weak, and will restore it to them."

The fundamental criterion for comparing social, economic and political systems, ought to be, not the criterion of hegemony and imperialism but the humanistic criterion, namely, the measure in which each system is really capable of reducing, restraining, and eliminating, as far as possible, the various forms of exploitation of man. Ali was the most implacable enemy of exploitation in all its forms, and he eradicated it from his dominions during his caliphate. Social organization, he believed, existed only for the service of man and for the protection of his dignity.

Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, had knocked down all man-made distinctions between human beings but after his death, they all came back. Ali declared that he was going to demolish those

distinctions again. Abu Ishaq Madaini, the historian, writes as follows, in this connection:

"Some companions of the Prophet told Ali that when distributing the revenues of the public treasury to the Muslims, he ought to give a larger share to the Arab nobles than to the Arab commoners; and he ought to give a larger share to the Arabs than to the non-Arabs. They hinted that doing so would be in his own interest, and they drew his attention to the example of Muawiya who had won the friendship of many rich and powerful figures through his 'generosity.' Ali said to them: 'Are you asking me to be unfair and unjust to the poor and the weak of the Arabs and the non-Arabs? Doing so may be good politics but is not good ethics. If I were to act upon your advice, I would, in effect, be imitating the pagans. Is that what you want me to do? What is important for me, is the pleasure of God, and not the pleasure of the Arab nobles. If I were distributing my personal wealth to the Muslims, I could not discriminate against the non-Arabs and the clients. But the wealth that I am distributing to them now, is not mine; it's their own. How can I show discrimination? How can I deprive a man of his share only because he is a non-Arab, and give it to someone else only because he is an Arab? This I shall never do."

Not only the Quraysh and the Arab aristocracy did not receive any preferential treatment from Ali over the non-Quraysh and the non-Arab in the distribution of public funds, but the members of his own family received less than anyone else in his dominions. One of them was his own elder brother, Aqeel. He considered his stipend to be so small that he could not live on it, and he left Kufa and went to Syria where he lived in style and luxury at the court of Muawiya. Ali repeatedly warned Muslims of the dangers of moral compromise and of subverting their worth to materialism.

When Ali ascended the throne of khilafat, he committed himself to putting an end to the economic caste-system of the Arabs, and their un-Islamic capitalist system. Within four years of his incumbency, he had fulfilled his commitment. The caste-system of the Muslims and their new capitalist system, both had vanished from his dominions. All the 'high priests' of the economic caste-system of the Arabs, and their neo-capitalists found sanctuary in Damascus. If Muslims are equal, then their equality ought to be an obvious thing but it was not. Ali made it obvious. And if Islam prides itself on its attachment to justice, then it (justice) ought to

be a visible thing but it was not. Ali made it visible. He made equality obvious and justice visible.

From his own officials, Ali demanded and exacted personal and fiscal integrity of the highest order. He served notice to everyone that even the most powerful office in the government cannot be used as a sanctuary for miscreants nor its legitimate privileges employed to withhold evidence of wrong-doing.

What were the mainsprings of Ali's actions and policies? It appears that every detail of his life was governed by taqwa (the fear of doing something that would displease God). He entertained only that thought, he uttered only that word, and he performed only that deed which he knew, would win for him the pleasure of God. His every thought, his every word, and his every deed, was tested on the touchstone of taqwa. His whole existence revolved around one question, viz., what shall I think or what shall I say or what shall I do that will please my Creator.

To the Machiavellians of all times the ends have justified the means. To them, all means, fair or foul, are legitimate, if they can achieve a certain end. But if Ali had to employ a certain means to achieve an end, it had to have the sanction of Al-Qur'an al-Majid. On numerous occasions, the so-called worldly wisdom and prudence dictated a certain course of action. But if such a course of action was repugnant to Qur'an, Ali spurned it, and he did so with utter disregard to consequences.

This policy made Ali extremely predictable and vulnerable. It is said that if one has the ability to predict, then one has a certain amount of control over a situation or a person, and control means power. The enemies of Ali knew exactly what he would or what he would not do in a given situation. This foreknowledge of his actions and reactions gave them an advantage over him, and they were ever ready to exploit it. They also took the maximum advantage of his chivalry and gallantry.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Ali's government was its "transparency" and its openness. If ever there was a government that was "transparent," it was his government. He was suspicious of secretiveness, and believed only in "open covenants openly arrived at." Muawiya himself boasted that the key to his own "success" was in his secretiveness,

and he attributed Ali's "failure" to the fact that he (Ali) did not hide anything from his subjects.

From the Machiavellian point of view, Muawiya was right. He kept others guessing about each of his moves whereas in the case of Ali, no guesswork was necessary. In dealing with Ali, his enemies could dispense with speculation of all kinds. To him, secretiveness smacked of deviousness, and if anything was devious, it was not acceptable to him. From the first day, he placed the credo of snooping and secrecy under interdiction in his dominions. When a friend asked Ali why he had agreed to take charge of the government with its myriad's of problems, he said that he did so to restore the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, knowing that no one else in Dar-ul-Islam had this ability. After the battle of Siffin, Ali said in one of his prayers:

"O God! You know well that the struggle we have waged, has not been for the sake of winning political power, nor for acquiring territory nor for worldly goods; rather, it is my aim to implement the luminous principles of Your exalted religion, and to reform the conduct of affairs in Your land, so that Your humble slaves may live in security, and Your laws which have remained unfulfilled, might be established and executed once again as they were in the time of Your Messenger and Friend, Muhammad."

Ali was unable to conceal his contempt for and his hostility to those Arabs who, as "the gluttons of privilege" had become immensely rich and powerful. He and they "repelled" each other. On the other hand, he was irresistibly drawn toward the poor and the powerless. They were his friends. Among the rich and the powerful, Abu Sufyan and Mughira bin Shaaba, had made tentative attempts to ingratiate themselves with him but he had snubbed them, and had put an unbridgeable distance between himself and them.

Ali turned his caliphate into a "school" in which he educated or rather reeducated the Muslim umma. He faced an enormous reeducation job, but he carried it out with consummate style and characteristic flair. He was a "one-man university" in Islam. The "curriculum" in his "university" laid the greatest emphasis on character-building of the Muslims. He found the "blueprint" for character-building in the Book of God, and he found "precedents" for it in the life of Muhammad, the Messenger of

God. At the "university," he interpreted the "blueprint" and the "precedents" for the edification and the education of his "pupils" – the Muslim umma.

Ali was the champion of the vision that united mankind in obedience to its Creator. He was the champion of our Creator's vision of justice, truthfulness, purity and peace. The central dedication of his life was to restore absolute justice to the Dar-ul-Islam. In this quest, he was eminently successful.

Ali's External Policy

Ali's critics often point out that he did not attack other countries as both his predecessors and successors did, and he did not push the frontiers of the empire of the Muslims in any direction.

Ali was caliph for four years, and those years were shot with rebellions and civil war, and all his time was taken up in his efforts to restore peace to Dar-ul-Islam.

But if there had been no rebellions and no civil war, and if Ali's reign at home had been peaceful and tranquil, would he have embarked upon invasions and conquests of neighboring countries? There is no way of answering this question, but judging by his character and temperament, it appears highly unlikely that he would have done so. It appears highly improbable that he would have sought "glory" for himself or for Islam by overrunning other countries. Quest for such "glory" ran counter to his nature.

The key to the understanding of Ali's policy at home and abroad, is in the fact that he was the heir and successor of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and the Messenger of peace.

Muhammad was the last Messenger of God to mankind. He was the embodiment of the highest attributes of character and personality. In his life, there is the most perfect example for all Muslims to imitate, and his program for the welfare, happiness and salvation of mankind, is the most comprehensive.

Apostleship and Prophethood are the greatest honors that any mortal can receive in this world. To be an apostle or a prophet means to be chosen by God. A man must indeed be endowed with most

extraordinary qualities to be picked by the Creator Himself out of the immense mass of humanity to be His messenger to mankind.

Such a man was Muhammad. He was picked out by God to be His instrument in implementing His plan and program for the world. He lifted the human race out of its moral and spiritual captivity, and put it beyond the ignorance, fear and isolation which beset it. God had sent many other messengers before him but he was the last one of them all, and the message he brought, was not subject to the limitations of time and place; it was for all time, and its keynote was universalism.

Muhammad was indeed endowed with the most extraordinary qualities of head, hand and heart. Anyone of these qualities could easily make him the most remarkable man in history. But at this point, we shall consider only one of his many qualities – the quality of mercy. He personified mercy. Al-Qur’an al-Majid has called Muhammad "a mercy for all creatures."

We sent thee not, but as a mercy for all Creatures. (Chapter 21; verse 107)

This quality of mercy in Muhammad as Messenger of God, is incompatible with aggression and lust for conquest. Warfare and bloodshed cannot coexist with mercy.

The message that Muhammad brought from Heaven, and which he promulgated on earth, is called Islam, and Islam means "peace and security." Islam is the religion of peace. A man who accepts Islam is known as a Muslim, i.e., one who has made peace. Muhammad himself defined a Muslim as a person from whose tongue and hands, other peaceful citizens are safe.

One of the key words in Islamic terminology is Iman which means "the principles of peace," and the person who has Iman is called a Momin which means "a man who abides by the principles of peace." Muhammad who brought God's last message to this earth, is called al-Rasul al-Amin, i.e., "the Messenger of Trust." Makkah, the city in which he delivered this message, is called al-Baladul-Amin, i.e., "the City of Peace." Makkah, therefore, is a sanctuary, and whoever enters it, is safe from harm.

The name of the mother of Muhammad is Amina which again means "peace." The name of his father is Abdullah which means "the slave of God." As slave of God, he obeys God, and does not trespass on the rights of others – the other slaves of God. Amina and Abdullah brought the Messenger of Peace into the world to put an end to bloodshed and to spread the blessing of peace on earth.

The name of Muhammad's nurse was Umm Ayman which means "the mother of Fortune." The angel who brought the message of Heaven to Muhammad, is called al-Rooh-ul-Amin i.e., "the Spirit of Trust." His successor is called Amir al-Mominin i.e., "the leader of the peaceful believers." Therefore, from beginning to end, Islam is peace and security.

Another key word in Islamic terminology is jihad. There is so much fog around this word that it can hardly be seen for what it is. In most non-Muslim circles, the jihad of Islam is equated with wanton aggression which it is not. Literally, jihad means effort or struggle. One of the most commendable forms of jihad imposed upon a Muslim is to fight against ignorance and injustice, and to overcome one's own lusts and baser instincts. Islam has recognized war as an institution but has allowed its followers to fight only:

(a)either in self-defense,

(b) or, to impose penalties for breach of peace, also called Qisas in Arabic which means "retaliation." Qisas is permitted only to check aggression. Islam does not allow Muslims to wage war for any third reason.

In Makkah, Muhammad presented to the Arabs a program of religious, ethical, moral and social reconstruction. After the migration to Medina, he added an economic and a political component to it. It had taken him thirteen years in Makkah to lay the groundwork of Islam, and it took him another ten years in Medina to build and to complete its "edifice." These 23 years were the most crucial years in the career of Islam as a universal system.

When Muhammad began to implement his program, he was immediately and inevitably confronted by multiple challenges. Characteristically, Islam produced Ali ibn Abi Talib as its response to those challenges. The 23 years of the ministry of Muhammad as the Messenger of God, were a long series of crises – both of war and of peace – and Ali surmounted them all.

Ali was the heir and successor of Muhammad. When he began to implement Muhammad's program, he too was confronted by multiple challenges. A quarter-century had passed since the death of his master, Muhammad, and since then many Muslims had begun to worship economic and political power as their new "idols." Idol-smashing was nothing new to Ali. Many years earlier, he and his master, Muhammad, had destroyed the idols of Quraysh in the Kaaba. Now he was called upon once again to destroy the new "idols" of the Arabs. But he realized that the champions of the new "idols" would rise in their defense just as the champions of the old idols had risen in their defense in the times of Muhammad.

Islam was a revolutionary movement in the sense that it was an emphatic end of an old and fossilized, i.e., polytheistic era, and the beginning of a new and dynamic, i.e., monotheistic era. Its aims are set forth in Al-Qur'an al-Majid, and its Prophet has been charged with specific duties, as we read in the following verse:

A similar (favor have you already received) in that We have sent among you an Apostle of your own, rehearsing to you Our signs, and sanctifying you, and instructing you in scripture and good sense, and in new knowledge. (Chapter 2; verse 151)

These aims, obviously, are so important that they have been repeated, for emphasis, on three other occasions. They occur in the following verses of Qur'an:

1. Chapter 2; verse 129
2. Chapter 3; verse 164
3. Chapter 62; verse 2

The aims of Ali's government were the same as the aims of Qur'an. His policy, therefore, was:

1. to rehearse the Signs of God (before the Muslims);
2. to sanctify them (the Muslims);
3. to instruct them (the Muslims) in Scripture, and in good sense;
4. to instruct them (the Muslims) in new knowledge.

As stated above, when Ali tried to enforce this policy, he met resistance, but not from the pagans. Most incredibly, he met resistance from

the Muslims. The Muslims, and not the pagans, thwarted him in the execution of his plans, and in the realization of his aims.

The aims set forth in Qur'an for the Muslim umma do not comprehend conquest of other lands by force of arms. Those critics of Ali who lament that he did not add new territories to the map of Islam, will also have to lament the uniform silence of Qur'an on the subject of expanding the dominions of Islam through war and aggression. In fact, judging by its text, Qur'an appears to have no interest in military adventures of any kind.

Most of the political and military leaders of the world agree with President Charles de Gaulle when he said: "The sword is the axis of the world," which means that the world revolves around the sword. The medieval French called this concept the "fort mayne" – the strong arm; i.e., whoever has the strongest arm, rules.

Many leaders also agree with the political philosophy summed up in the maxim that all is fair in love and war. In pursuit of their ambitions, they have considered it quite fair to wage war upon other nations, to kill their men, and to enslave their women and children. If some of these leaders have soaked the world in blood, and have obliterated cities and civilizations, they have been acclaimed as the greatest heroes and the greatest military geniuses of history. And yet, their heroism and genius have only proved Gibbon right when he said:

"What is history but a register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind."

Does Islam also equate its program with lust for the conquest of alien nations? If it does, then how is it different from the programs for world conquest of such military leaders as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan, Hulago Khan, Tamerlane, Napoleon and Hitler all of whom marched with those "sisters of victory – murder, pillage, fire, destruction, captivity, loot and rape?" All wars are alike in at least three particulars: death, destruction and rape. The pages of history are stained with the blood of the weak and the innocent shed by the powerful and the ruthless.

If Muslims also stained the pages of history with blood, is it the proof of the truthfulness or even of the greatness of Islam? Can Muslims take

pride in unprovoked wars of aggression and conquests? If they do, they would find themselves at odds with the Book of God which states:

There has come to you from God a new light , and a perspicuous Book – wherewith God guideth all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leadeth them out of darkness, by His will, unto the light – guideth them to a path that is straight. (Chapter 5; verses 17,18)

Many Muslims are held in fascination by the "military glories" of the century 632-732 of their history. President Lincoln put military "glories" in correct perspective for the glory buffs when he said:

"Military glory is the attractive rainbow that rises in showers of blood."

Whose blood? The blood of the weak, the inoffensive, and in most cases, the innocent!

President Truman once called war "the ugliest invention of man." Is there any invention uglier than war? What invention other than war has the power to kill men on mass scale, and to make children orphans and women widows? What other invention of man has the power to reduce cities to rubble and cinders, and to breed undying hatred and hostility among nations?

The truth is that Islam and war do not blend. Islam is a blessing of God. In fact, it's the greatest blessing of God on earth. Its name means peace; and peace and security are blessings whereas fighting and bloodshed are a curse. The wars and the conquests of the Arabs did not exactly jibe with the program of Islam. Many of these wars were prompted by political necessity or expediency, or by sheer lust for conquest. Most of the Arabs who went out of Arabia, after the death of the Prophet, were not Islam's missionaries. They were plain conquerors. Most of them lacked the knowledge of Islam, and they lacked interest in spreading Islam. Most of them were born and bred in the pagan tradition, and they had been fighting against the Muslims only two or three years earlier.

G. E. Grunebaum

Mohammed himself was quite aware that the Bedouin had been only superficially won over. "The Arabs (i.e. the Bedouin) say, we have adopted the faith (amanna). Say (to them): Faith ye have not. Rather say: We have become Muslim (aslamna). For faith has not yet entered your

hearts." (Koran 49:15) (Classical Islam – A History 600 – 1258, p. 51, 1970)

Though at the beginning, the Arabs were sent out of the peninsula for political reasons, as stated above, soon they found reasons of their own to maintain the momentum of conquest. The propulsive force in their case was the love of booty. Arabs were invincible in war if they had the assurance of obtaining booty. Apart from this, there was little else that interested them. If they had no hope of obtaining booty, they had no interest in fighting. The attitude of the Muslims of Medina toward Uthman during the last days of his life, makes this point quite clear. They were the same Muslims who had repeatedly repulsed the attacks of the pagans. But now in their city, the head of their state was besieged in his own palace. The besiegers were only a few hundred strangers, with no roots in town, and with no support of any armed force. The siege lasted for 49 days, and was raised only when Uthman was killed. But the Muslims of Medina were not roused to act. Why not? They were not roused to act in defense of their khalifa because they had no hope of obtaining booty.

The love of the Arabs for plunder was an old addiction. It was this love which was responsible for the disaster of Uhud. The lovers of booty abandoned a strategic pass, in defiance of the orders of the Prophet, and by doing so, they changed victory into defeat. Qur'an has also borne testimony to this predilection of the Arabs in verses 152 and 153 of its third chapter.

M. Shibli

A most complex problem was the love of the Arabs for plunder. It was this love which triggered most of their wars. In pagan times, the love of booty was an obsession for them. But when they became Muslim, their love for booty did not diminish in them.

It is reported that on one occasion, the Apostle of God sent some of his Companions to a certain tribe for taking punitive action. The leaders of the tribe in question came to ask if the Muslims would negotiate terms of peace with them. The captain of the group of the Companions said that peace was very welcome to him if they accepted Islam. The tribe accepted Islam whereupon the Companions returned to Medina. But they

were very unhappy at this outcome, and they reproached their captain for depriving them of the opportunity to obtain booty for themselves. They were not content merely with reproaching him, but also, upon arrival in Medina, complained to the Apostle against him (their captain). But the Apostle applauded the decision of the captain, and said that God would reward him for saving the lives of many people. (Life of the Prophet, Vol. II, 1976, Azamgarh, India).

These companions of the Prophet were the "model" Muslims. They were supposed to be "unworldly." It would be entirely logical to assume that since they were the personal friends of the Messenger of God, they would not be contaminated with the lust for riches. Or, if, at one time, they were contaminated with such lust, it would be logical to assume that his companionship modified their character to such a degree that the love of booty was no longer an obsession with them that it once was. But they proved these assumptions to be wrong. It were these "pious" and "devout" companions who were eager to plunder a tribe. But the tribe in question accepted Islam just in time, and thus escaped their clutches.

The love of the rank-and-file Arabs (the non-companions, the commoners) for plunder, was even less restrained.
Sir John Glubb

While the Bedouins had formed the mass of those Arab armies which had conquered Persia and Byzantium for the faith, the instinct for plunder was ineradicably implanted in their nature. (The Great Arab Conquests, p. 313, 1967)

Love of plunder was an instinct of the Arabs. Ali wanted to change, or, at least, to sublimate this instinct, and he tried. But the attempt was only partially successful, and the cost was prohibitively high.

Both during and after the battle of Basra (the battle of the Camel), Ali had forbidden his troops to plunder the camp of the enemy and the city of Basra. It was a great disappointment to them. They, however, had no intention of giving up the fruits of their labors so easily. They believed that the city of Basra was their prize as conquerors, and that they had a right to make prisoners of the enemy. When this right was denied to them by Ali, they threatened to disobey his orders.

It was a dangerous situation for Ali. He had to squelch mutiny of his troops. This he succeeded in doing when he posed the following question to the potential mutineers: "Which one among you will take Ayesha, the mother of the believers, as his share of the prisoners of war?"

This question had never occurred to the mutineers, and they were left utterly bewildered and speechless by it. How could a Muslim make Ayesha, the widow of his Prophet, a prisoner, and still remain a Muslim? They then acquiesced into accepting Ali's fiat – no plunder and no captives!

Nevertheless, the loss of opportunity to plunder Basra, rankled in the hearts of many of Ali's soldiers, and they also resented the curbs he had imposed upon them. Their resentment simmered until it flared up in the battle of Siffin. It was this resentment which was so deftly exploited by Muawiya that it broke out as mutiny, and Ali was compelled to call off the battle which he had almost won.

Chapter 69

Ali as an Apostle of Peace

ALI AS THE RIGHT ARM OF ISLAM and the shield and buckler of Muhammad, is a vast and a complex subject. But Ali as an Apostle of Peace is a subject just as vast and just as complex. Few men, if any, have loved peace more or hated war less than Ali.

The students of history know that appeals in the name of peace, justice and fair-play, are made only by those people who are weak and who are on the defensive. There is no reason for the strong and the aggressive to make appeals in the name of peace. Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane and other great conquerors of history didn't make any appeals for peace to the nations they had defeated. If Louis XIV and Napoleon ever sued their enemies for peace, it was only when their own armies began to suffer reverses. In our own times, it was not Hitler who was appealing to anyone for peace; it were the nations he had overrun which were appealing to him for peace in the name of humanity.

If there is any pattern in history which is consistent, it is that the mighty, heady with power, rides roughshod; the weak seeks or tries to seek refuge in moral imperatives and ethical doctrines.

To this general and universal rule, there is, however, one exception, and that is in Ali ibn Abi Talib. Even when he was strong and his enemies were weak, he appealed to them for peace in the name of humanity, and he appealed to them to refrain from shedding blood. Even when he was victorious, he acted toward his defeated enemies as if they would do him a favor by forswearing war. If an enemy was overcome, and he wished to save his life, all he had to do was merely to ask Ali to save his life, and he (Ali) saved his (the enemy's) life. And he did so with no

preconditions. His enemies knew this through long experience, and they took every advantage of this knowledge. Many among them escaped the penalty of death in this manner, for treason and rebellion.

As noted before, Ali was consistently consistent in upholding principle. For this consistency, he had to pay a very high price. But was there an alternative? For him there was not. If he had, at any time in his career, compromised with principle, then he would have been no different from other rulers. The other rules and leaders pay most eloquent tributes to their own ideals and principles but in practice they give their devotion only to realpolitik; to the philosophy of politics minus ethics; and they put their own self-interest ahead of everything else.

If Ali had ever sacrificed principle to policy, then his government would have ceased to be the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. This he could not allow. He had revived the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth which was first established by Muhammad. Both of them knew that the "Kingdom" was a delicate and a frail structure, and that it was threatened on all sides by hostile forces - both overt and covert. They knew too that if they compromised with principle, then the "Kingdom" would collapse from within. Doing so, therefore, was unthinkable for them. They did not compromise with principle, and if they had to pay a price for upholding it, they cheerfully paid it.

Ali was grappling with the moral scourge that war represents. He believed that war and the preparation for war, were incompatible with the health and well-being of the human race. The conquest of war, therefore, was his grand preoccupation.

For Ali, all was not fair in war. He rigidly applied and enforced the commandments of Qur’an to politics and war. If he could win a victory through questionable means, he preferred to forgo victory but he did not take recourse to deceit. His own principles and his own humanity were, to him, far more important than victory in war.

As already noted in an earlier chapter, during the times of the Prophet, whenever Ali met an enemy in battle, he offered him three options. They were:

1.Accept Islam; or,

2.Do not fight against Muhammad who is the Apostle of God, and withdraw from the battle;

3.If the first two options are not acceptable to you, then you be the first one to strike at me.

During his own caliphate, Ali was compelled to fight against those Muslims who had risen in rebellion against the central government. He appealed to them to resolve disputes through negotiation instead of fighting. Fighting, for him was the last option, and the most repugnant one. But if anyone challenged him, then he (the challenger) had to be the first to strike at him. He was never the first to strike at his foe. He insisted on fighting only a defensive action.

In the campaigns of the Prophet, before a general engagement of the forces, the champions of each side fought duels just like the Roman gladiators. In the battle of Uhud, a champion from the Makkan army rode out of his ranks and challenged the Muslims. Ali went out to meet him. Moments later, Ali had vanquished his opponent, and had planted his knee on his chest to deliver the coup de grace. In that moment, as a last act of defiance, the fallen champion spat on Ali.

It would have been a perfectly normal and human reaction on the part of Ali to have plunged his sword into the heart of the offender, who, now prostrate, had violated a rule of pagan chivalry – an unpardonable offense in Arabia.

But Ali did just the opposite. He rose from the chest of his enemy, put his sword into the scabbard, and walked back to his own lines.

Both armies were watching this drama, and both were surprised but no one was more surprised than the enemy who had just been overcome, and could not believe that he was safe. What was the meaning of this strange act, he wondered; wasn't Ali going to kill him for his insolence?

The Makkan hero rose from the ground, overtook Ali, and asked him why he did not kill him. Ali said:

"Your foul act made me angry. Now if I were to kill you, I would find satisfaction against a personal injury. But I am not seeking satisfaction

against any personal injury. I do not want to kill anyone for any personal reason."

When the pagan warrior heard Ali's answer, his astonishment was even greater than before. But he understood that Ali was fighting for an ideal. Ali's answer accomplished what his sword had not; it destroyed the unbelief of his adversary, and he (the adversary) accepted Islam.

This one act epitomized Ali's philosophy of life. He demonstrated that his hatred, just like his love, was impersonal. He did not hate or love for himself; he hated or loved only for the sake of God. If he fought, it was only to win the pleasure of God; and if he made peace, it was also to win the pleasure of God. His whole raison d'être was to win the pleasure of God.

If Ali disdained to kill for reasons of his principle, he also disdained to kill for reasons of his humanity. It was to his humanity that a man as dangerous and treacherous as Amr bin Aas owed his life in the battle of Siffin. Abbas Mahmud Al-Akkad of Egypt writes in his book, 'Abqariyyet Imam Ali (Cairo, 1970):

Ali's gallantry and chivalry did not allow him to take advantage of a situation in which he found his enemy cornered and helpless. (In the battle of Siffin) Amr bin Aas suddenly realized in an encounter that he was confronting Ali, and he fell to the ground on his face. Anyone else would have killed him, and thus got rid of a source of constant trouble but Ali turned his gaze away in disgust, and did not meddle with him."

In the battle of Siffin, Ali often fought in disguise. He was thus disguised when Amr bin Aas challenged him but a moment later he recognized him. Upon recognition, he did not lose his presence of mind. He fell on his face and uncovered his derriere, knowing exactly how Ali would react to this stratagem. (Ali was predictable!)

Ali recoiled from the repulsive sight. A subaltern in his (Ali's) army shouted: "This is Amr bin Aas. Don't let him escape. Kill him." But Ali forbore from killing Amr bin Aasas the latter lay in that abject position.

The last battle that Ali had to fight, was the battle of Nehrwan, fought in 658. In that battle, a Kharji warrior found himself under the edge of

Ali's sword. Expecting to be cleft into two halves, he was frozen with fear, and his sword and shield fell from his hands. But at that moment, he was surprised to see Ali stay his hand, turn the reins of his horse away from him, and engage someone else. Not believing his own eyes, he shouted: "Ali!Are you not going to kill me?" "No," answered Ali. "Why not," the Kharji asked, "it will mean one enemy less for you."

Then the following exchange took place between them:

Ali: I cannot kill you now because you have lost your sword and shield, and you have nothing with which to defend yourself.

Kharji: I understand, and this is just what I had heard about you that you do not kill an unarmed enemy. But I have also heard something else, and would like to know if that is true.

Ali: What is it that you have heard and wish to verify now?

Kharji: I have heard that you do not turn down the request even of an enemy if it is not unreasonable. If this is true, then I would like you to give me your sword now that I have lost my own.

The request was not very reasonable, especially considering its time and place but Ali did not hesitate. He seized the blade of his sword, and held out the hilt to the enemy. The latter took it, reassured himself that Ali had no sword, and asked:

Kharji: You are now unarmed, Ali. Tell me who will save you from me now?

Ali: God. God will save me. My trust is in Him, and not in the sword or the shield.

Ali's answer surprised the die-hard Kharji once again, but it also conquered him, and he exclaimed:

"You have conquered me, O mysterious man! From this moment, I will be your slave. I shall fight on your side against your enemies, and I shall kill them."

The Kharji's offer ought to have pleased Ali, and he ought to have welcomed him in his own ranks, but he said:

"Do not fight for me or against me. Fight only for Justice and Truth. If you believe that Justice and Truth are on my side, then by all means, fight on my side."

The hand of Ali was the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of Islam. On every occasion, it opened the gate of victory while every other hand failed to do so. His hand was also the "key" to peace, and peace cannot find a protagonist greater than him anywhere. But as stated above, he was a protagonist of peace from a position of strength, and not from one of weakness. His work was the texture of peace itself.

Ali was not building an empire. He, therefore, did not act like an empire-builder. An empire-builder has to be an aggressor, an invader. He has to overrun other countries and he has to pull down other empires on the ruins of which he can build his own empire. Ali did not have any such aims. He, therefore, did not invade any country. His aim was only to restore the momentum of work which his master, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, had begun. This he succeeded in doing during the few years of his caliphate.

Ali lived an austere life in the true sense of the term. His clothing was made of the coarsest material with many patches on it. His food was dry crusts of stale barley bread which he had to soak in water so they could become edible. Occasionally, he ate some dates. He was extremely abstemious, and often told the Arabs not to eat too much, and particularly, not to eat too much meat. ("O Arabs! Do not make your stomachs the graves of animals.")

In Medina, Ali made his living as a laborer. When he became the sovereign of the Muslims, his lifestyle didn't change. He still made his living as a laborer. He ruled the Muslims with the "collaboration" of labor. In a sense, his government was the first "labor government" of history, and also its last, since he was not an "arm-chair" laborer but actually worked in fields and gardens for a competence.

Ali often paid rich tributes in his speeches to the laborer, the worker and the craftsman. They were "the friends of God," and could anyone do better than to cultivate them – the friends of God? He cultivated them, and he was instinctively drawn toward them. Conversely, and it may appear strange, he could never, at any time in his life, cotton to the rich. From the beginning, there was an inexplicable estrangement between him and them. He was as distant from the "landlords," the "magnates," and the "tycoons" of those days as one pole is from the other. Ali felt very much ill-at-ease with them.

Ali gave dignity to manual labor by his personal example. He mended his own clothes and his own shoes, milked his own goats, drew water from the wells, and loaded and unloaded the camels of the caravans. When he was in Medina, he made his living as a gardener for a Jewish farmer. He irrigated his fields. He made labor honorable, and made laborers proud of their calling. His empire was a land of social benevolence and a real "labor paradise" such as the world has not seen before or since.

Though the four years of Ali's reign were convulsed with rebellions and civil war, no one in his dominions ever went hungry. Not only there was no hunger but also there was no inflation. Everyone had plenty to eat and to spend. In Kufa, the orphans, the widows, the old,and the sick persons did not have to worry about food and shelter; Ali took all their burdens away from them. In the provinces, his governors had to feed the poor and the hungry before they could feed themselves.

To the orphans, Ali showed so much affection and love that it was said that he pampered them. He collected all the bonbons, honey and other delicacies that he could, and fed them on these. Ali was one of the greatest humanitarians who ever lived. In Kufa, he had provided shelter to a leper in a place outside the city. He visited him daily, dressed his wounds, fed him with his own hands as the latter had no hands, put him in his bed, and then returned to the city. Ali was not only the greatest warrior-saint of Islam, and its apostle of peace; he was also the first patron of learning in the Muslim umma. Mahmood Saeed al-Tantawi of Egypt writes in his book on the Ten Companions of Muhammad, published in Cairo in 1976:

"Ali stood at the pinnacle of glory in all the branches of science. He was the most knowledgeable man in Islamic jurisprudence. He was the greatest authority in the sciences of Qur’an. He had a more thorough grasp of the aims, and a more perfect understanding ofthe meaning of Qur’an than anyone else. He maintained the purity of Arabic as a language, and he spelled the rules of its grammar. He was the most eloquent of all orators, and when he spoke, he touched every heart such as nothing else ever did. People who heard his speeches, often cried like children.

These accomplishments would be truly extraordinary if they were found in someone else. But they are not extraordinary in Ali because he ought to be like this. After all, it was the Apostle of God himself who brought him up, and educated him. Ali was unique in the sense that he drank deep of the Prophetic knowledge at its fountainhead itself. This is something that no one else has done except him." (Ten Companions of Muhammad, pp. 150, 157, 162)

All the savants in the orders of tassawuff (Islamic mysticism) trace the fundamentals of their doctrines to Ali's philosophy. He is the acknowledged monarch of the realm of sainthood. The purport of his philosophy is the dynamic love of God, and the love of His entire creation.

Ali's speeches, sermons, letters, edicts, epigrams and aphorisms compendiously styled Nahjul-Balagha (the Course of Eloquent Wisdom), constitute a fountainhead of Islamic philosophy, and a treasure-house of the sciences of Qur'an. They enlighten the reader on a vast variety of subjects such as the Oneness of God, the recognition and the love of God; life and death; heaven and earth; creation and final annihilation; private and public morality; freewill and predestination; government and its duties; the ethics, logic and the philosophy of Qur'an; exegesis of Qur'an; history and its logic; law and jurisprudence; man's relationship with God and with society; the relationship between divine and practical laws; the good society; reason and rationality; the moral basis of the state; the nature of right rule and sovereignty; justice and responsibility; and Muhammad's mission as God's Last Messenger to mankind, his precedents and his traditions.

Ali spoke and wrote with consummate grace and wit, and he put special stress on precision. The ideological messages saturate Nahjul-Balagha's text and imagery.

Tirmidhi and Tabrani, the collectors of the traditions, have quoted Muhammad, the Apostle of God, as saying: "I am the City of Knowledge, and Ali is its Gate."

As the First Disciple of Muhammad, Ali made the most magnificent contributions to the realm of thought with the equally magnificent contributions to the domain of action.

Ali's military services to Islam tend to overshadow his intellectual achievements. They monopolize the attention of the student of history, and thus the overall picture tends to get "out of focus." Actually, he was the founder of the intellectual discipline and the intellectual ascendancy of the Muslims. No caliph ever produced such a cascade of documents, commandments, letters, speeches and sermons; and no caliph ever addressed himself to such a vast range of topics, as he did. His writings, edicts and lectures on the exegesis of Qur'an are the intellectual underpinnings of Islam. He was the apotheosis of versatility.

Jurji Zaydan, the Lebanese-Egyptian historian, writes in his Collected Works, vol. I, (page 550) that when Amr bin Aas invaded Egypt, the governor of Egypt sent to him the letter which Muhammad Mustafa, the Apostle of God, had addressed to him (to the governor), a few years earlier, inviting him to Islam. Amr received the letter, and it bore the seal of the Prophet.

The historian further says:

"He (Amr) recognized the seal of the Prophet. He then looked at the writing, and it was the writing of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib. Ali was the first man who introducedthe art of writing in (the propagation of) Islam. He was the secretary of the Prophet. There were some other secretaries also, and Amr bin Aas was one of them. When he was satisfied that it was the letter of the Prophet, he kissed it, placed it on his head, and then read it as follows… "

Ali was, therefore, the pioneer who "mobilized" the art of writing in the service of Islam. Abbas Mahmud Al-Akkad of Egypt, says in his book, Abqariyyet Al-Imam Ali (Cairo, 1970):

"It remained to him (to Ali) to give guidance in the doctrine of Tauheed (Monotheism), in Islamic justice, in jurisprudence, in Arabic grammar, and in the art of Arabic writing. We would be right if we call his work the foundation of true Islamic sciences of all ages. Or, better still, if we call him the Encyclopedia of all Islamic Knowledge in the first century of Islam."

During his own caliphate, Ali was forced to deal with a series of rebellions but whenever he found intermittent periods of peace, he took

optimum advantage of them to put across the ethos of Islam to the umma of Muhammad Mustafa.

Multitudes of seekers of knowledge gathered in Kufa to hear Ali's speeches. After each speech, he invited questions from them. He often said to them:

"O Muslims! Ask me any questions on any subject that you may have in your minds, and do so now. Remember that I will not be with you forever."

Ali encouraged free inquiry and open debate on all religious, doctrinal, legal, political, philosophical and scientific subjects, and he encouraged Muslims to make the mosque a "forum" for the free expression of their ideas.

Ali had profound belief in the dignity and worth of the individual, and his right to freedom of choice in his religious persuasion, and in his political, economic and social institutions. He had faith in man's capacities and abilities to fulfill his destiny as God's vicegerent on this earth. Addressing man in one of his odes, he said:

"Thou thinkest that thou art a small body (microcosm); yet the greater world (macrocosm) is hidden within thee."

Ali came nearest to being a "sovereign person." He was a saint, a scholar, a worker, a poet, a soldier, a conqueror, a judge, a philosopher, a humanitarian, a jurist, an orator, an administrator and a statesman but above all things, he was the beau-ideal of all those men and women who love God. The hub of his character was the love of God. He was "intoxicated" with the love of God. His speeches and sermons are vibrant with this love. In one of them, he said:

"My greatest happiness comes to me when I am waiting upon my Creator. This happiness is so great that I cannot think of any other recompense that can surpass it. It is its own greatest reward."

In another sermon he said:

"I do not worship God prompted by my eagerness to enter heaven because such is the worship of a man who is working for his wages. I do

not worship God prompted by the fear of being thrown into hell because such is the worship of a slave. I worship God out of my love for Him, and the knowledge that He alone is worthy of that devotion and obedience which I give Him."

In a letter which Ali wrote to a friend, he said:

"If all those veils which hide our Creator from our sight, were lifted from my eyes, and if I were to find myself in His presence without any of those veils, my faith in His existence would remain exactly the same as it is now."

Ali was buoyantly conscious of God's infinite goodness and mercy. One of his favorite prayers was:

"I seek the refuge of the infinite might of the Almighty, and I seek the sphere of His limitless mercy and blessings, and I invite you to pray with me so that He may give us the willingness and the ability to surrender our will to His will, and enable us to acquit ourselves honorably before Him, and before His entire creation."

The source of the passages quoted above, is not Ali's intellect or his imagination but his buoyant love of God!

Chapter 70

Ali and the Ideals of Freedom and Liberty

IF IN THE UMMA OF MUHAMMAD, THE PROPHET OF ISLAM, Ali was the greatest apostle of peace, he was, without a doubt, also the greatest defender in it of the freedom and liberty of the individual.

In the selection of a leader for the Muslims, Ali had been bypassed thrice but by a supreme irony, it was with him that they found the privilege, for the first time and for the last time in their entire history, to freely choose their own leader, and they chose him. In choosing Ali, they were unconsciously choosing the guarantor of their own freedom.

As noted before, when the Muhajireen and the Ansar in Medina insisted that Ali should take charge of the government, and he agreed to do so, he declared that no one was under any obligation or under any pressure to take the oath of loyalty to him. Therefore, all those men who took the oath of loyalty to him, did so voluntarily.

But there were many people in Medina who not only withheld their pledge of loyalty to Ali but also began to leave Medina. Ali made no attempt to stop them. When his attention was drawn to their departure, he said that under his rule everyone was free to live in Medina or to leave it, and that he was not going to force anyone to live or to leave. His enemies wanted to leave Medina and he let them leave, and he did not ask them any questions.

Most of the companions of the Prophet who were in Medina, had taken the oath of allegiance to Ali. Among them were Talha and Zubayr. They had hoped that Ali would make them governors of Kufa and Basra. But Ali selected other men for those two positions whereupon both of

them left Medina with the intent of breaking their solemn pledge. Ali let them go.

This policy of "laissez-faire" is in sharp contrast with the policy of Umar bin al-Khattab, the second khalifa, who had forbidden the principal companions of the Prophet, especially the Muhajireen, to accompany his armies into Persia or Syria or Egypt, and had ordered them to stay in Medina, much to their chagrin. He had done so ostensibly because of his fear that they would exploit their influence and prestige which they enjoyed as companions of the Prophet, if they were allowed to go into the newly-conquered provinces. The companions, as yet, had not done anything to exploit their influence. But Umar presumed that they would, and on grounds of this presumption, restricted their freedom of movement.

Ali did not detain Talha and Zubayr in Medina on grounds of his presumption that they nursed treason in their hearts against the state, which both of them did.

A few months later, Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr, rose in rebellion against Ali, and marched on Basra. But Ali still did not use any "strong-arm" methods to bring them into line. He had to take up their challenge but he preferred to do so without using his powers of state.

In the first place, Ali did not conscript anyone. He went into the Great Mosque of Medina, and told the Muslims about the insurrection of Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr. He appealed to them to support him in maintaining peace in Dar-ul-Islam, and in protecting the integrity of the state. He also reminded them that they had given him their pledge to obey him in peace and in war. But there was no answer. He renewed his appeal on the second day and the third and the fourth.

After many days, only seven hundred men responded to Ali's appeal, and it was with this tiny force that he left Medina. At no time did he try to dragoon anyone into his army. All those men who fought on his side were volunteers.

In the second place, Ali gave amnesty to the citizens of Basra though they had merited the penalty for treason. He, in fact, did not even make

them prisoners when they were defeated in battle. He thus allowed his friends as well as his foes to enjoy the blessing of freedom.

Ali's refusal to arrest those men in Medina who did not give him their pledge of loyalty, his permission to Talha and to Zubayr to leave Medina, and his amnesty to the rebels of Basra, are an eloquent testimony to his resolve to uphold the ideals of freedom and liberty.

Ali proved that in the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, freedom and liberty were not some remote and shadowy ideals to be cherished by the Muslims but were their right, and that they were not to live like prisoners in any sense of the term. Curtailed freedom is incompatible with the privilege of citizenship of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever was admitted to the Kingdom of Heaven was emancipated; he became free and remained free.

When Ali took charge of the government, the Muslim umma was in a state of anomie. Its ruling classes had reached a state of undreamed-of affluence, and the ultimate arrogance of power. He realized that the social, economic and political order of the state called for a restructuring of government and society. But his attempt to restructure government and society was resented by the rich and the powerful, and their resentment erupted in the battles of Basra and Siffin, as noted before.

A third group which declared its opposition to Ali's policy of reform, was made up of the Kharjis. They wished to achieve their aims through violent revolution and upheaval. They made it obvious that they would not let Ali restore efficiency, integrity and strength to the government through peaceful and systematic means.

The Kharjis abused the freedoms that Ali gave to the Muslims. They not only criticized his policies but also questioned his faith itself. But he did not try to stifle them. He tolerated their most intemperate and stinging criticism as long as they did not disrupt peace, and did not imperil the security of other Muslims.

Ali left error of opinion to be tolerated if reason was left free to fight it. But the Kharjis took every advantage of their freedoms, and began to spread anarchy, lawlessness and terror in the land. It was only when they passed beyond the threats of killing law-abiding citizens, and

actually killed many of them, that Ali was compelled to move against them to check their excesses.

The city of Kufa, Ali's capital, was open to the Kharjis and to his other enemies. They enjoyed as much freedom as his friends did. They lived in Kufa, or they came in and went out as they pleased. Ali never placed any of them under surveillance.

All subjects of the Islamic State - men, women and children – were paid a stipend from the State Treasury. The Khawarij collected their share same as other citizens. Ali and his officers never made any attempt to make them affable, docile and pliant through economic pressure. They remained hard-boiled enemies of state and society committed to subvert both. Eventually one of them killed him.

Yet through it all, even in the darkest moments, Ali never allowed adverse fortunes to obliterate the ideals of freedom and liberty from the psyche of the umma of Muhammad. Freedom and liberty remained for him sacrosanct, indestructible, and indomitable, like his own faith in the ultimate and inevitable triumph of Justice and Truth.

Perhaps nothing is easier than to sing the praises of freedom and liberty but Ali is the only statesman in the whole world who paid his tributes to them, not in rhetoric, but in palpable deeds. No ruler in world history ever gave more freedom to his subjects – friends and foes alike – than Ali! The freedom which he gave to his subjects first cost him victory in the battle of Siffin, and then cost him his own life. But it appears that in his opinion, their freedom was a most precious entity, and he did not begrudge the price he had to pay to preserve it.

Ali's reign was a new dispensation for the human race, and a new hope for humanity. Never again, in their history, the Muslims and the non-Muslims were ever to enjoy such freedom and liberty as they did during the caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib!

Ali and his Legacy

Ali had contempt for wealth and ostentation; he had respect for the individual; and he had faith in the ultimate power of reason if left unfettered by myth or privilege. He was an enemy of privilege, and he fought against it all his life.

As the true guardian of Islam, Ali kept his eye only on the interests of Islam. If he had to sacrifice his life to protect the interests of Islam, he did so gladly. On the night of the Migration of his master, Muhammad, from Makkah to Medina, he slept in the jaws of death. From that day, his life was consecrated to the service of Muhammad and the defense of Islam.

In studying Ali and his career, three principal components become obvious. The first is his character, which is almost universally acknowledged to be one of the loftiest. In person and in office, he stood behind the ideals and the principles that are codified in the Qur'an. The record of his caliphate shows that his ideals and principles are a challenge to every generation of the Muslims: equality for all people; freedom, inviolable even in times of war and "national" emergency; peaceful human progress, through personal opportunity and the help of the institutions of the government. He, thus, represented the ultimate triumph of character and ideology.

The second is Ali's achievements as a military leader. He was an inspired general whose humanity astonished everyone. He led the Muslims in battle with superb skill, intuition, forbearance and clemency. He alone succeeded, among all the sovereigns, in blending the idealism and the philosophy of Islam with the strategy and tactics of politics and war.

The third is the extent to which Ali's conduct and moral influence made a contribution to the welfare and greatness of the Muslims. He taught them that the means to achieve an end were just as sacrosanct as the ends themselves, and that the means no less than the ends, had to be beyond any question. He clearly was concerned with the most fundamental things.

The ideal Islamic society is the one in which the people and their rulers obey the law of God. Ali's aim, therefore, was to induct the masses into the ranks of those people who obey that law. By doing so, he extended the range of the ethos of Islam, and strengthened its bases.

Ali presented to the Muslim umma the same symmetry of character as his master and leader, Muhammad, had done before him; and both of them demonstrated the same ability and the same moral fortitude of

successfully meeting the most cruel tests and challenges with which victory and adversity alike confronted them.

The spirit of making sacrifice for duty and principle, is the heritage of all the apostles of God. The same spirit is the "legacy" of Ali ibn Abi Talib to the umma of Muhammad Mustafa. May God bless both of them and their families.

Chapter 71

A List of "Firsts" in Islam

SOMEONE IN ISLAM WAS THE FIRST MAN OR THE FIRST WOMAN to do or to say something, and this made him or her a pioneer. Following is a list of some of the deeds which made their authors "pioneers." The list, of course, is not by any means exhaustive.

(1). Hashim, the great-grandfather of Muhammad ibn Abdullah and Ali ibn Abi Talib,inaugurated the mercantile system of Hijaz, which, for those times, was a revolution in the economic life of Arabia. By doing so, he changed the Quraysh from shepherds into merchant princes.

Ibn Ishaq

"It is alleged that Hashim was the first to institute the two caravan journeys of Quraysh, summer and winter, and the first to provide tharid (broth) in Makkah."

(2). Khadija bint Khuwayled, the wife of Muhammad Mustafa, was the first convert to Islam.

(3). The first male who bore witness that God was One, and Muhammad was His Messenger, was Ali ibn Abi Talib.

(4). The first meeting place in Islam was the house of Arqam bin Abil-Arqam in Makkah.

Betty Kelen

"Early Islam was a youth movement, which was at first thought of as a harmless club. There were in those days about 40 members, and they took to meeting in a large house on the outskirts of town belonging to a rich young man named Arqam of clan Makhzum. The house of Arqam is remembered by Muslims as Islam's first meeting place."

(5). The Yasirs were the first "whole family" to accept Islam (outside the family of the Prophet himself). Yasir; his wife, Sumayya; and their son, Ammar; all three accepted Islam as soon as they heard the Call of the Messenger of God. Some people have claimed that it was Abu Bakr who was the head of the first "whole family" which accepted Islam. This claim lacks evidence. Abu Bakr's son, Abdur Rahman, was an idolater, and he fought against the Apostle of God in the battle of Badr. Abu Bakr's father, Abu Qahafa, was also an idolater who became a Muslim only after the conquest of Makkah in 630.

(6). The pagans in Makkah tortured Yasir and his wife, Sumayya, and their son, Ammar, day after day, for accepting Islam. All three of them were the first Muslims whom Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, gave the tidings that they would enter Heaven.

(7). Sumayya, the wife of Yasir, was the first Believer who became a Martyr in Islam.Her husband, Yasir, was the second Martyr in faith. Both of them were tortured to death by the pagans. Their son, Ammar, was also destined to win the crown of Martyrdom though he did so in the battle of Siffin in 657.They became, in this manner, a family of all Martyrs in Islam – a distinction which no one else has ever shared with them. God Himself picked them out for this great honor.

(8). The first man to read Qur’an out aloud in the Kaaba was Abdullah ibn Masood, the companion and friend of Muhammad.

Ibn Ishaq

"Yahya b. Urwa b. Zubayr told me as from his father that the first man to read Qur’an loudly in Makkah after the Apostle was Abdullah ibn Masood."

(9). The first man to be killed in the precincts of the Kaaba was Al-Harith ibn Abi Hala, the nephew and adopted son of Khadija, the wife of Muhammad. When the latter proclaimed the unity of God in the Kaaba before an assembly of the idolaters, they subjected him to physical violence. Al-Harith ibn Abi Hala entered the fray to defend him. They stabbed him repeatedly, and he fell dead on the ground. He thus became the third Martyr in Islam.

(10). Ammar ibn Yasir was the first man in Islam to build a mosque. He built his mosque in Makkah itself.

Ibn Ishaq
"Sufyan ibn Uyayna mentioned on the authority of Zakariya from al-Shabi that the first man to build a mosque was Ammar ibn Yasir."

(11). Mas'ab ibn Umayr was the first official in Islam. In 621, a group of the citizens of Yathrib (Medina) came to Makkah. They met the Prophet at Aqaba; they accepted Islam, and they requested him to send with them to Yathrib a teacher of Islam and Qur'an. The Prophet sent Mas'ab ibn Umayr, a cousin of his father, with them. This was the first time an official was chosen in Islam. Mas'ab ibn Umayr was the First Representative of Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, in any capacity.

(12). Abdullah, son of Abd al-As'ad, was the first man to migrate from Makkah to Yathrib (Medina) in 622.

(13). Bilal was the first "muezzin" of Islam. His voice rang out in Medina with the shout of Allah-o-Akbar (God is Great).

When Medina developed all the characteristics of a state, it also acquired a treasury, and Muhammad appointed Bilal its officer-in-charge. He was in-charge of the Bayt-ul-Mal of the State of Medina. This made him the First Treasurer of Islam. He made allocations of all funds. He was also responsible for distributing funds to the widows, orphans, the wayfarers and other poor people who had no means of supporting themselves.

(14). Hamza ibn Abdul-Muttalib, the uncle of Muhammad and Ali, was the first military commander in Islam. The Apostle of God had sent him at the head of 30 Muhajireen to intercept a caravan of the Quraysh, led by Abu Jahl. But there was no action, and the expedition returned to Medina.

(15). The first governor of Medina was Saad ibn Ubada Ansari. In the second year of Hijra, the Apostle personally led an expedition to Waddan. During his absence, Saad ibn Ubada officiated as the ruler of Medina.

(16). The first military commander whose men were involved in bloodshed, was Abdullah ibn Jahash, a cousin of the Apostle. He led an expedition of seven men to Nakhla.

(17). The battle of Badr, fought in 624, was the first encounter, on the battlefield, between Islam and paganism. A pagan champion, Walid bin Utba, challenged the heroes of Islam to single combat. His challenge was taken up, on the side of Islam, by Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first male convert to Islam.

Ali killed Walid bin Utba after a few minutes of fencing. This was the overture of the long struggle between Islam and paganism. It was to end as it had begun, with the triumph of Islam over paganism, and Ali was the architect of that triumph.

(18). Obaidah ibn al-Harith ibn Abdul-Muttalib, was the first Muslim to be killed in battle. He was a cousin of Muhammad and Ali, and he was the first Martyr of the battle of Badr.

Zayd ibn Haritha was the first Muslim to be killed on foreign soil. In September 629, the Apostle sent him as the general of the army which was to engage the Romans in Syria. The two armies met in the battle of Mootah, and Zayd was killed in it.

(20). Akib ibn Usaid was the first governor of Makkah. It was the first permanent civil appointment made in Islam. Akib took charge of his duties as governor of Makkah in January 630.

Chapter 72

The "Indispensability Equation" of Islam

THE EARLY YEARS OF ISLAM WERE A TIME OF STERN TESTS and grim trials for the Faithful. Every day brought for them new confrontations with, and new challenges from the polytheists, and merely existing in a hostile environment, was an unending struggle. The entire ministry of Muhammad as God's Last Messenger to this world, which spanned the last 23 years of his life, was overshadowed by this struggle.

It was a titanic struggle. Only men and women of invincible faith, indomitable courage, and unflagging strength could have lived through its stresses and tensions. To grapple with it, therefore, Islam produced its own "titans." The "titans" of Islam were two individuals and two groups. The two individuals were Abu Talib ibn Abdul-Muttalib and his son, Ali; and the two groups were the Banu Hashim in Makkah, and the Ansar in Medina.

The "base of operations" of Abu Talib and the Banu Hashim was Makkah whereas the "theater" of the conflicts in which Ali and the Ansar were drawn, was Medina. Together, they made up what might be called the "indispensability equation" of Islam. Each of the four components of this "equation" was indispensable for the existence of Islam, and each of them was destined to play a very special role in its history.

The first component of this equation was Abu Talib. God charged him with the duty of protecting Muhammad and defending Islam. His house in Makkah was the cradle of Islam. Muhammad, the future Prophet, was born in his house. Later, the same house became, first the "school" of Muhammad, and then the "fortress" of Islam.

Abu Talib was a man of great prestige, resourcefulness and power but the problems he faced, as the defender of Islam, were of such magnitude that he could not have overcome them all by himself. He had, therefore, to enlist support. But who in Makkah would support him against the Quraysh except the members of his own clan – the Banu Hashim? He rallied them, and it was their collective support that guaranteed the existence and the survival of Islam in Makkah.

The clan of Banu Hashim was consistent and monolithic in its support of Muhammad and Islam. Its members dared three years of perils and privations as exiles in a mountain ravine but they did not forsake Muhammad. The polytheists were daunted and dismayed by the united and defiant front presented by the Banu Hashim to them, and to the rest of the world.

The day Abu Talib died, it appeared to Muhammad that the mighty bulwark of Islam had caved in. The death of Abu Talib did not, however, interrupt the tradition of protecting Muhammad and defending Islam that he had founded; it was carried on by his son, Ali, who was destined to distinguish himself even more than his illustrious father in service to Islam. His genius unfolded in Medina. He busted up the pagan monolith of Arabia. But just as the support of Banu Hashim was found to be indispensable for Islam in Makkah, the support of the Ansar was found to be indispensable for it in Medina. The Ansar rallied behind Muhammad in Medina just as the Banu Hashim had rallied behind him in Makkah.

Abu Talib and Ali, and the men and women of the Banu Hashim and the Ansar were extraordinary by the standards of their day as well as by our own. They took up every challenge to Islam, and they overcame ever crisis in its career. They alone protected and defended the principles, the honor and the heritage of Islam. The names of all these heroes are not known to history but each of them was indispensable for Islam. Each of them, man or woman, made up the "indispensability equation" of Islam. Without the contribution in services of each of them, the "equation" of Islam might not have "jelled" at all.

There were other Muslims also – the companions of the Prophet – who played roles of their own in varying degrees of importance in the history of Islam. Some of them played major roles and others played minor roles but no one among them played roles that were great enough to make

them indispensable. Many of them distinguished themselves after the death of the Prophet but if they had died in his lifetime, they would not have even been heard of. In his lifetime, they were secondary and marginal characters who assumed individual reality and complexity only after the death of their master.

John Kenneth Galbraith, the American economist and diplomat, once isolated the journalistic malady he called "the build-up." The essence of the build-up, he said, is to recast a personage of average attributes into historic, indeed immortal image. This appears to have been done in the case of many of the Muhajireen. Most extravagant praise has been lavished on some of them, and in many cases, the praise has been attributed to the Prophet himself, and has thus been given the "status" of hadith (tradition of the Prophet). Actually, countless of these "hadith" or traditions are nothing more than fanciful embroideries of the fertile and fervent imagination of some admirer or admirers of the companions.

Examples of "hadith" glorifying some of the companions of the Prophet are legion but here it is possible to quote only one of them. One of the most famous "traditions" is the one called the "Hadith of Ashra Mubasharra." The Prophet is alleged to have given his personal assurance to ten of his principal companions that all of them would enter heaven. They were:

1. Abu Bakr
2. Umar
3. Uthman
4. Ali
5. Talha
6. Zubayr
7. Abdur Rahman bin Auf
8. Saad bin Abi Waqqas
9. Abu Obaida Aamir bin al-Jarrah
10. Saeed bin Zayd

The authenticity of this tradition is open to question on the following grounds:

(1). All these ten companions are Muhajireen and not one of them is an Ansari – a very curious omission indeed! Just as the Ansar had no share in the Saqifa government, now it would appear that they had no place in heaven either. It is truly fantastic that the Prophet could not find a single

Ansari who was worthy of belonging to this group of ten. And yet, it were the Ansar who gave sanctuary to Islam and to the Muhajireen themselves.

Muhammad Mustafa was neither ungrateful nor forgetful. He could not have forgotten the hospitality shown by the Ansar to him. He had, in fact, accepted the hospitality of the Ansar with great pleasure. On the other hand, he appeared to have had many reservations in accepting any obligation from any of the Muhajireen, and he never did. If he was not ungrateful, and he was not, then this "tradition" cannot be genuine.

(2). Some of these citizens of paradise, when they were living on this earth, were fighting against each other, and were trying to kill each other. Two of them – Talha and Zubayr – were rousing the mob to kill an incumbent khalifa – Uthman – who was also a member of the same group. Later, both of them broke their solemn pledge of loyalty to another incumbent khalifa – Ali – and shed the blood of thousands of innocent Muslims. Ali had, in fact, tried to save the same Muslims from butchery. And yet, according to this tradition, the potential killers and the potential victims – both would enter heaven!

(3). Even among the Muhajireen, there were men who were more distinguished than some of these ten men but the Prophet didn't assure any of them that they would enter heaven. Mas'ab ibn Umayr, Abdullah ibn Masood, Bilal ibn Ribah, Zayd ibn Haritha, and his son, Usama, and Abdullah ibn Rawaha, were far more distinguished than Uthman, Abdur Rahman bin Auf, Obaidullah bin Aamir al-Jarrah, and Saeed bin Zayd, and yet the Prophet did not give them any assurance that they would enter heaven.

It is not known what was the standard for judging who would enter heaven, and who would be refused admission to it. If piety was the touchstone for admission to heaven, then among the companions – both Muhajireen and Ansar – there were many others who were more pious and more devout than some of these ten men. Five out of them were great capitalists. They were the pillars of the capitalist system of the Muslims.

There is nothing wrong in being a capitalist as such; but capitalism, especially in its undiluted form, was the symbol of an economic system

against which Muhammad, the Messenger of God, had fought all his life. He fought against it because it rested upon the principle of ruthless and unconscionable exploitation of the poor. He found predatory capitalism nursed and protected by the powerful cartel of the Quraysh of Makkah. The cartel was entrenched, fortified and impregnable but through long and persistent effort he was, at last, able to demolish it.

Muhammad never identified himself with the guardians of the capitalist system. On the other hand, he identified himself with the poor. He often said: Alfaqru fakhri (Poverty is my pride). But after his death, the capitalist system was exhumed and was resurrected. The Electoral Committee which Umar had appointed to select a new khalifa, was a cartel of the (new) capitalists, reconstituted in Islamic times. It is true that he had made Ali one of the electors but the latter did not belong to the group. Actually, his relationship with this cartel was the same as that of Muhammad with the cartel of the Quraysh in Makkah.

Both cartels were exclusive. The cartel in Makkah excluded the non-Qurayshites and the poor from its membership; the cartel in Medina excluded the Ansar and the poor from its membership. Both cartels were run by the Qurayshites for the exclusive benefit of the Qurayshites.

The new capitalism was "sanctified" because of its connection with the principal companions of the Prophet, and very soon it rose into such a position of dominance in Dar-ul-Islam that it could not be dislodged again. When Ali made an attempt to dislodge it, its guardians challenged him, and Dar-ul-Islam erupted into civil war.

Soon Ali was assassinated, and after his assassination, predatory capitalism found itself free to swagger unchecked and unbridled over the landscape of Islam.

The Shia Muslims consider the "Ashra Mubasharra" a fake tradition because it does not jibe with reason, and still less with the ethos of Islam. They consider it a product of the malady called "the build-up." Its essence, they believe, was to recast common, garden-variety men into historic, indeed immortal image.

Chapter 73

The Sacrifices of Muhammad for Islam

Great aims, to be achieved, call for great sacrifices, and success in making a reality out of them comes at high cost. The greater the aim, the higher is the price one has to pay to realize it. Man's struggle to free himself from the chains of slavery and tyranny is thousands of years old, and it has taken countless lives. The struggle goes on today as it did in the past, and its story is endless because the struggle itself is endless.

Three of the most important landmarks in man's struggle for freedom are the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Chinese Revolution of 1949. They are also three of the most momentous events in world history. Tides of blood rose in the wake of these revolutions, and as they receded, they carried away the old systems and symbols of oppression and exploitation with them. These revolutions generated new forces which are, even today, churning the whole world. They were the price man had to pay to buy his political and economic freedom.

(The Russian Revolution and the Soviet Empire collapsed from within, after 73years – in 1990. They did not prove to be viable.)

Many centuries earlier, i.e., in the seventh century, another revolution had changed the course of history. It was one of the greatest revolutions of all time but the remarkable thing about it was that it was peaceful. It did not whip up any tides of blood, and in fact, ought to be called a "bloodless" revolution. It was a message of peace. Peace was its insignia, and peace or Islam was its name.

Though Islam upheld peace in the world, it did not become viable without a struggle. It was, in fact, locked up, for 23 years, in a sanguinary struggle for survival, and just like the other great movements of

emancipation, it also called for sacrifice. It is remarkable that Muhammad – the Messenger of God and the Prophet of Islam – did not imitate other leaders who push their followers into the flames of war in the name of "sacrifice" for an ideal. He himself was the first one to offer sacrifices for Islam.

Webster's definition of a sacrifice is to suffer loss for an ideal. Parting with one's most highly treasured possessions for the sake of an ideal, constitutes sacrifice. Most of the apostles and prophets lived lives of sacrifice. Abraham offered his son, Ismael, as a sacrifice; and John the Baptist, offered his own life as a sacrifice. Ismael might have been killed but was replaced just in time by an ibex. John the Baptist, however, was executed, and his head was presented to a wanton to soothe her vanity. He is one of the greatest martyrs of all time.

These are two out of many examples of sacrifice that called for great courage and great faith. But both from the qualitative and quantitative points of view, the sacrifices which Muhammad offered for Islam, remain unparalleled in history.

A distinction must be made here between material sacrifices and the sacrifices of life. Muhammad made both. He sacrificed all his personal comforts, and all his material possessions for the sake of Islam. This, of course, everyone knows. What is perhaps not so well-known, is the fact that some of his nearest and dearest kinsfolk were killed in the defense of Islam. The relatives of Muhammad who made their lives an oblation for Islam, are as follows:

1.Al-Harith ibn Abi Hala, adopted son, and nephew of Khadija. He was killed in Makkah.

2.Obaida ibn al-Harith ibn Abdul-Muttalib, cousin. He was killed in the battle of Badr.

3.Hamza ibn Abdul-Muttalib, uncle. He was killed in the battle of Uhud.

4.Mas'ab ibn Umayr, uncle. He was killed in the battle of Uhud.

5.Abdullah ibn Jahash, cousin. He was killed in Uhud.

6. Zayd ibn Haritha, adopted son and friend. He was killed in the battle of Mootah.

7.Jaafer Tayyar ibn Abi Talib, cousin. He was killed in the battle of Mootah.

8.Aymen ibn Ubayd, foster-brother. He was killed in the battle of Hunayn.

This is a roster of some of the most distinguished names in all Islam, and it includes two uncles, three cousins, two adopted sons, and one foster-brother of Muhammad. It was through such sacrifices that he made Islam invulnerable and indestructible.

Muhammad never made any attempt to be protective to his own loved ones. It were, in fact, his loved ones who were the foremost in taking up the challenge of an enemy. There was no one he loved more than Ali, and yet, the position of the greatest danger in every confrontation with the pagans – in Makkah or in Medina – was invariably reserved for him.

The greatest sacrifices for Islam were all made by Muhammad and Ali.

On the other hand, Abu Bakr and Umar did not make any sacrifice. As for sacrifice for Islam is concerned, they have nothing to show. Whenever a challenge came from the pagans, as it did in the battles of Badr, Uhud and Khandaq, they (Abu Bakr and Umar), did not accept it; and no member of their families was killed in the defense of Islam at any time. The only relative that Umar ever lost in the struggle of Islam and paganism, was his maternal uncle, Abu Jahl, who was killed in the battle of Badr.

The crown of martyrdom is the greatest honor and the greatest glory that Islam can bestow upon a Muslim in this world. The loved ones of Muhammad and Ali won eight of them in the lifetime of the former, and they were destined to win many more after his death. May God bless them all.

Chapter 74

The Major Failure of Abu Bakr and Umar

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A POLITICIAN AND A STATESMAN, it has been said, is that the politician thinks of the next election, the statesman of the next generation. What it means is that the impact of a politician on the public is transitory whereas that of a statesman is enduring.

In the case of leaders who are dead, people remember them according to whether their actions and ideas changed the course of history, and whether their works have become part of the national heritage.

Abu Bakr and Umar were great statesmen and their actions and ideas changed the course of history. Without a doubt, they were great leaders, conquerors and administrators.

But notwithstanding all the greatness of Abu Bakr and Umar, there is one area in which their vision as statesmen failed them, and it failed them totally. The area in question relates to the leadership of the Muslims. They failed to create an apparatus of succession for the Muslim umma. They failed to develop a system of peaceful transfer of sovereignty from one incumbent to another.

Before Abu Bakr and Umar, their master, Muhammad, the Messenger of God, had designed an apparatus for orderly and peaceful transfer of power. But most unfortunately, they (Abu Bakr and Umar) dismantled it. In its stead, they designed an apparatus of their own. Their apparatus was workable but it had too many "bugs" in it.

In contradistinction to the inspired plan of Muhammad for succession, Abu Bakr and Umar adopted a makeshift system of their own in Saqifa.

Their system was successful in the sense that it put power in their hands; first one and then the other of them became the successor of Muhammad. After all, nothing succeeds like succession! But as events were soon to show, their system was incompatible with a coherent strategy. Coherence, and not visceral ad hoc-ery is the essence of statesmanlike strategy.

When Muhammad, the Apostle of God, died, Abu Bakr and Umar inaugurated the al-Khilafat er-Rashida (the Rightly-Guided Caliphate), and Abu Bakr became the first "rightly-guided caliph." Two years later, when he was dying, he appointed Umar as his successor who then became the second "rightly-guided caliph."

Ten years later, Umar lay dying, and he was confronted once again with the problem of transferring power. But all that he did, was to design a jerry-built apparatus to find a leader for the umma even though he had gained long experience of government and politics.

The dismantlement by Abu Bakr and Umar of the apparatus for transfer of power which Muhammad had given to his umma, proved to be the greatest tragedy in the history of Islam.

Maurice Latey, writing about the Roman Emperors, in his book, Patterns of Tyranny, published by Atheneum, New York (1969), says:

"The means color the end: and for all Augustus' statesmanship, the methods by which he seized power, left a fatal flaw in the foundation of his empire which repeatedly shook the edifice and finally destroyed it."

For all the statesmanship of Abu Bakr and Umar, the methods by which they seized power, left a fatal flaw in the foundations of al-Khilafat er-Rashida, which repeatedly shook the edifice and finally destroyed it.

Al-Khilafat er-Rashida collapsed in the midst of civil wars, assassinations and chaos, just as Umar himself had predicted. Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan, who had been awaiting the opportunity for thirty years, to grab the caliphate, moved in to fill the power vacuum, and he did so with no pretense of piety or even of sanctimony.

As noted before, Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, was still alive when the potential candidates for power, and their supporters had worked out a plan or a master-plan which was designed to supersede his plan for succession. According to their plan, Abu Bakr was to be the first successor, and Umar and Uthman were to be the second and the third successors of Muhammad. The latter knew what some of his companions were trying to do, and it was because of this knowledge that he placed all of them under the command of Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha, ordered them to leave Medina, and to go on a campaign to the Syrian frontier. But they defied his orders and did not go.

The companions discarded Muhammad's plan for succession, and elevated Abu Bakr to the throne of khilafat. Before his own death, two years later, he appointed Umar as khalifa. Ten years later, when Umar was dying, he "stage-managed" the selection of Uthman as his own successor, as noted before, and the "master-plan" worked with perfect precision.

But there is no way of knowing what did Abu Bakr and Umar think would happen after Uthman. It appears that Umar tried to look beyond Uthman. Thinking of the times after Uthman, he "adopted" Muawiya as his protégé. Just as Muhammad had groomed Ali for ruling the Muslim umma after himself, Umar groomed Muawiya for the same purpose.

Muawiya had heard Umar denouncing the mode of election of Abu Bakr to khilafat as "an unprémeditated affair," one from the "evil effects" of which God had saved the Muslims. Therefore, when he became khalifa, he gave a burial to the method by which Abu Bakr was elected khalifa. He abolished the elective systemthus putting an end de jure to the institution which had been deprived of its power de facto by Abu Bakr himself when he designated Umar as his successor instead of leaving the choice of a leader to the Muslim umma.

Muawiya demolished the house built by Abu Bakr and Umar in a reversal of ideology.

Muawiya's rise to power signalized the spectacular failure of the "Islamic" or rather of the Saqifa democracy.

Charles Yost

"Democracy is not a matter of sentiment, but of foresight. Any system that doesn't take the long run into account, will burn itself out in the short run." (The Age of Triumph and Frustration).

The Saqifa democracy didn't take the long run into account, and burned itself out in the short run, and out of its ashes sprang Muawiya the son of Hinda into super-stardom! Just as Abu Bakr had inaugurated the al-Khilafat er-Rashida, Muawiya inaugurated monarchy, and founded a dynasty. On the ruins of the al-Khilafat er-Rashida, he reared the edifice of the empire of the Umayyads. His political philosophy rested upon long-range, sequential and coherent strategy.

Ninety years later, Muawiya's empire folded up. On the debris of his empire, the Abbasis reared the edifice of their empire. Abbasis also inaugurated dynastic rule, and their political philosophy also rested upon long-range, sequential and coherent strategy, and they ushered in the "Golden Age" of the Arabs. The Golden Age of any nation symbolizes peace and prosperity. The Golden Age of the Arabs might have brought prosperity to some people but it did not necessarily bring peace to the Muslims. Even when the Abbasi power was at its zenith, their empire did not have any real peace.

G. E. Von Grunebaum

Religion too was the motivation of the uprisings which repeatedly convulsed the Abbasi empire. Even under the first Abbasids, who held power firmly, not a year passed without rebellion of some kind, large or small. (Classical Islam - A History 600-1258, p. 88, 1970).

Warfare inside the Dar-ul-Islam was a norm, and it was expected that wars would take place. The struggle for power was considered normal and inevitable. This struggle was the "legacy" of Saqifa to the Muslims. Most Muslims had become "addicts" of civil war. But if there was no war, it was considered a phenomenon so extraordinary that it boggled belief. Transition of power without bloodshed was considered a "freak."
G.E. Von Grunebaum

Abu Yaqub Yusuf, the son of Abd al-Mumin (Almohads), took over power without incident. He fell in the holy war before Santarem (Spain) in 1184. The next three rulers also, of whom the most important was Abd

al-Mumin's grandson, Yaqub al-Mansur (1184-1199) mounted the throne without having to put down any rebellion, a dynastic stability almost without parallel in the Dar al-Islam. (emphasis added) (Classical Islam - A History 600-1258, p.187, 1970)

A statesman is endowed with a vision that can penetrate generations and even centuries. Almost every nation has produced such statesmen. Those men of the 18th century who drafted the Declaration of American Independence, the Constitution of the United States of America, and the Bill of Rights, were such statesmen. They were prophetic. They designed apparatus for orderly transfer of power, and by doing so, they saved the American people from the trauma of war and bloodshed. They put "built-in" safeguards in the Constitution so that since 1789, sovereignty has passed from one incumbent or from one party to another without any incident. They condensed in 52 words a Preamble that is the most satisfactory statement of the purpose of government ever written.

RobertB. Downs

The nineteenth-century (American) historian, George Bancroft, believed that the Founding Fathers had acted under divine guidance, that they had been directed by God first to stage a democratic revolution, and then to write a democratic constitution. (Books that Changed America, London, 1970)

Considering the ephemerality of the al-Khilafat er-Rashida, it might appear that it did not have any divine guidance or divine blessing.

On January 20, 1981, Mr. Ronald Reagan, the fortieth President of the United States, said in his inaugural address:

"The orderly transfer of authority as called for in the Constitution takes place as it has for almost two centuries and few of us stop to think how unique we really are. In the eyes of many in the world, this every-four-year ceremony we accept as normal, is nothing less than a miracle."

The "Founding Fathers" of America achieved this miracle in the 18th century. Twelve centuries before them, Muhammad, the Apostle of God, had achieved the same miracle in Arabia. Here a student of history can see two miracles in "orderly transfer of authority." But whereas the

miracle of the American Founding Fathers turned out to be viable, the miracle of the Arabian Prophet turned out to be "still-born!"

Why?

For a very simple reason, viz., the young American nation gave massive and whole-hearted support to the principles enshrined in the American "miracle" but the key figures in the young Muslim umma withheld their support to the principles enshrined in the Islamic miracle.

As noted before, Muhammad was stymied by his own companions in the execution of his inspired design for orderly transfer of authority in the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. The latter had a design of their own, and they succeeded in putting it into effect at his death. But with their "success," they and their proxies opened the Pandora's Box of polarization, confrontation and conflict in the Dar-ul-Islam which took a dreadful toll from the Muslim umma. Countless Muslims were killed in their countless wars which were fought only because there was no apparatus for peaceful transfer of power from one ruler to another.

Many modern historians have noted and have commented upon the paradox of war and bloodshed in the Dar-ul-Islam, i.e. "the House of Peace."

Sir John Glubb

"Politically, the Muslim states, throughout their long centuries of leadership, constantly were torn by civil wars between rival claimants to rule. We see them once again frequently the scene of internal upheavals and of army seizures of power, precisely as they were 800 years ago Throughout history, Muslim armies have been employed in internal struggles more often than in external wars… " (The Lost Centuries, 1967)

Another historian has commented upon the political and moral decline of the empire of the Muslims in which young men perished fighting the interminable wars of their rulers, while the rulers themselves rotted away in gilded, bejeweled, be-eunuched palaces.

HerbertJ. Muller

They (the Umayyads) established a dynasty, set up a worldly court, introduced eunuchs into their harems, and in general ruled like Oriental kings, no longer associating with their fellows in the manner of Arab chieftains. Church and State, theoretically one, became in fact separate. Islam retained a misty devotion to the theory, but had no real political doctrine.

The Abbasids built a new capital at Baghdad, a cosmopolitan city that became the site of the Arabian Nights, and of a civilization much richer than Arabian. They brought Islam to the summit of its material wealth and power and its cultural creativity, producing the famous symbol of its splendor in the reign of Harun al-Rashid (786-809). Yet in this reign the basic rottenness of the Abbasid regime was already apparent. Harun had ascended the throne more easily because his brother had been murdered in the harem; he had to contend with many revolts in his empire; and his death was followed by civil war between his sons. The Islamic world shortly began to fall apart, as Persia, Spain, Egypt and other provinces became independent kingdoms. The empire built in the name of Mohammed and Allah had nothing of the staying power of the secular Roman Empire.

Strictly it had never been a real empire with a uniform government. The spiritual unity of Islam failed to inspire political unity; its rulers displayed little political intelligence and less idealism. While the Abbasid caliphs made a show of orthodox piety, most of them were recklessly impious and still more recklessly extravagant, squandering the wealth of Islam in luxurious living. They consciously modeled themselves crowned with the diadem, became increasingly autocratic and remote from their subjects, and made the army their personal property, recruiting it from among foreign slaves. Another innovation was the executioner who always accompanied them. The founder of the dynasty, Abul Abbas, had taken the name of Bloodspiller; his successors often had their own blood spilled, in assassination resulting from court intrigue. By the tenth century the caliphs of Baghdad were puppets of their "slave" army, lacking any real political or spiritual authority over their dwindling domains. The sorry pretense of their rule was ended in 1031. More caliphs popped up elsewhere in Islam, as in Egypt and Spain, but they too had only nominal authority. Other Islamic states repeated the Baghdad story of imperial splendor, intrigue, and civil war. An Arabian poet summed up the moral for their subjects: "Get sons - for Death! Build high - for

Ruination! March on - this road goes to Annihilation!" (The Loom of History, pp. 286-287, 1958)

Judging by this portrait, peace itself must have been at bay in the House of Peace (Dar-ul-Islam) since bloodshed and war were a far more familiar experience of its citizens. The Muslim umma has indeed paid a very high price for its failure to accept the plan of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, for transfer of authority.

Chapter 75

Who Wrote the History of Islam and How?

HISTORY, IT HAS BEEN SAID, IS THE PROPAGANDA OF THE VICTORIOUS PARTY.

What this means is that in any conflict, the victor can manipulate history just as it pleases him, and there is nothing that the vanquished can do about it. The victorious party can cook up a story and broadcast it as the absolute truth without any fear of being challenged by anyone. It has not only the power to cook up its own story; it also has the power to spike the story of an opposing party.

M. Shibli, the dean of India's Sunni historians of Islam, writes in his famous biography of Prophet Muhammad, Sira-tun-Nabi, volume I, 4th printing, published by the Maarif Printing Press, Azamgarh, U.P., India, in 1976:

"Among all those extraneous forces which affect and influence the writing of history, none is more powerful than the government. But it will always be a source of pride for the Muslims that their pen was never subdued by the sword. Work on the compilation and collation of Hadith was begun in the times of the Banu Umayya. For full 90 years, from Sind in India (Indo-Pakistan) to Asia Minor and Andalusia in Spain, Ali and the children of Fatima were cursed from every pulpit in every mosque after every Friday sermon. Thousands and thousands of hadith (traditions; statements of the Prophet) glorifying Muawiya, were manufactured, and were put into circulation. In the times of the Abbasis, hadith were invented foretelling the birth and the excellence of each (Abbasi) khalifa by name. But what was the result of all this stupendous effort? The traditionalists (the collectors of the statements of the Prophet) declared publicly at the same time (during the caliphates of the Umayyads and the Abbasis) that all these hadith were spurious, and they

rejected them. Today, we are proud to say that the science of hadith is free from all that filth and garbage."

Almost but not quite!

In the case of innumerable hadith, the attempt to excise a false report from hadith literature, or to correct it, never caught up with the original untruths.

Even after expurgation, if there was one, that part of the hadith literature which relates to the personal life of Muhammad, the blessed Prophet of Islam, is full of the quaint, the curious, the fanciful and the false. There are many hadith which make him appear as lustful and licentious; vindictive and cruel; opportunistic and unprincipled; and treacherous and unethical. Then there are some other traditions which can only be called smutty.

But the evidence of history runs counter to such characterization of Muhammad. He could have been all these things but he was not. It is important, therefore, for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, to separate bunk and junk from fact and truth in studying the history of Islam.

How did such "traditions" which defy commonsense and logic, insinuate their way into the hadith literature, and how were the deeds and statements which can only be called shocking, attributed to the man whose real life was the epitome of all purity, truthfulness, sincerity and simplicity?

Shibli has made a rather perfunctory attempt to answer this question in the passage quoted above. He says that the most powerful extraneous "agent" influencing the writing of history in the times of the Umayyads and the Abbasis (661-1258) was the government. The government in those days had the power to get history written to its own "specifications." Both dynasties felt they were free to distort history or to suppress history, and whenever they believed it was in their interest to do so – to invent ‘history.' Whereas many hadith were invented for political reasons, there were also those hadith which were invented for sensual reasons. The sybarites of the courts of Damascus and Baghdad sought "sanction" for their own pleasures in these hadith.

A hadith means a statement. If a man saw the Prophet doing something or he heard him saying something, and then he reported it to others, it would be called a hadith or a tradition. The companions considered it their duty to preserve all the traditions of the Prophet for the benefit of the Muslim umma for all time.

A hadith could also be a comment of the Prophet on some person. If he paid a compliment to any of his companions, or if he criticized someone, his remarks gained wide publicity among the Muslims. During the khilafat of Muawiya, many of these hadith were in circulation. He was quick to grasp their importance, and he decided to make them a political weapon in his campaign against Ali ibn Abi Talib and the Banu Hashim.

Muawiya who was the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, won for himself another "distinction." He founded the "cottage industry" for the production of hadith. His successors, and after them, the Abbasi khalifas, patronized the "industry" which for a long time was busy churning out hadith. Though Shibli claims that hadith was expurgated by highly critical, perceptive and analytic censors, there was much that escaped detection by them, and is accepted today as genuine by a vast majority of Muslims.

Muawiya appointed a team of men to make up statements favorable to himself and to the other enemies of Ali, and to attribute them to the Apostle of God as his own hadith. At the same time, he suppressed or tried to suppress the genuine hadith which were complimentary to Ali, and ordered his team to manufacture hadith derogatory to him. The members of this team concocted hadith of both varieties, and he put them into circulation.

After the death of Muawiya, this campaign was carried on by his successors. Their "ghost-writers," "public relations personnel," and "image-makers" skillfully blended fake hadith with genuine hadith, and synthetic history with factual history, hoping that the "mix" would "jell," as part of the sacred lore of the Muslims.

Muawiya had one more reason for going into the business of "hadith-production." He knew that the generations of the future would judge every Muslim ruler against the ideal ruler – Muhammad. He knew too that if they did, they would find him poles apart from Muhammad. He

was also aware that no matter what he did, he could never rise as high as Muhammad; he knew in fact that he could not reach the heights attained even by the slaves of Muhammad. But it occurred to him that though it was not possible for him to reach the sublime plane on which Muhammad stood, it was possible for him to bring him (Muhammad) down to the plane on which he (Muawiya) stood by the simple process of tarnishing his (Muhammad's) reputation, so that he too would look like other mortals.

Muawiya hoped that the indictment of the historians against him would be less severe if it was shown to them that even the most perfect man – Muhammad, God's Own Messenger – was not altogether free from blemishes of character. Clearly, much of the content of hadith literature was a conspiracy for the character assassination of Muhammad, the Messenger of God.

Muawiya and the other entrepreneurs of his "cottage industry" were "successful" in their attempt at the character assassination of Muhammad. They interspersed hadith literature with countless stories, anecdotes and "incidents" the intent of all of which was to make Muhammad look, in the eyes of posterity, less than prophetic.

Following is a sample of one of the "printable" traditions which has come down to us. It is quoted by Hakim Muhammad Saeed in an article published by the Hamdard Academy, Karachi, Pakistan, in 1972, in a book called Tazkar-i-Muhammad:

"Shortly after their marriage, Muhammad, the Apostle of God, suggested to his new bride, Ayesha, that both of them run in a race. Ayesha was thin and lean, and she easily outran her husband. Some years later, the Apostle challenged Ayesha to run against him once again. (She had put on weight during the years since the first race). Both of them ran, and this time the Apostle outran her. His comment: 'Last time you were the winner, O Humayra (Ayesha's nickname) but this time I have won, and now the score between us is even.'" (Perhaps the defeat in the first race had rankled in the mind of the Apostle all these years.)

Muhammad, the Apostle of God, was 54 years old when he ran in a race against a girl of 9 or 10, and he lost; and he was 60 years old when he ran against her a second time, and won!

Muslims are very jealous of the dignity of their Prophet. Is this "tradition" which most of them believe to be true, a portrait of that dignity?

It appears that the "foremen" and the "production managers" whom Muawiya had appointed in his "hadith factories," had only one love, and that was quantity. They had geared the "industry" only to mass produce "traditions." It is obvious that they had no interest in the "quality control" of their products. They planted lies in their books, and each lie left in its wake, as it invariably does, "a drop of poison," that polluted the minds of generations of Muslims. Some of their products are extremely crude. They are, in fact, unprintable. The critics and the enemies of the Prophet, inevitably, have shown great eagerness in accepting them as authentic, and they have quoted them in their books.

These critics and enemies of the Prophet have not, however, taken into account those facts the authenticity of which is beyond any question. For example, they overlooked the fact that in Makkah, the Quraysh had offered to him the most beautiful woman or women as a quid pro quo if he would give up preaching Islam. They also forgot the fact that Muhammad was the sovereign of Medina, and that he could have married any girl. The Arab chiefs would have been proud to give him their daughters.

The Prophet married many women in Medina but most of them were widows, and they were not very young either. With the exception of Khadija, all the other women entered his household when he was in his mid-fifties or late fifties. They entered his life at a time when the spring and the bounce and the sheen and the vigor of his youth had long since departed, and their place was taken by the ever-growing burdens of an ever-growing State, and other problems of superlative complexity and magnitude, leaving him little time or inclination for such dalliance as is reported in many of the "traditions."

For the compilation of hadith, Muawiya had given the following orders:

1. All the traditions of the Prophet in praise of Ali or upholding his superiority in any way, should be suppressed.

2. Any man narrating the virtues of Ali or quoting the hadith of the Prophet in this regard, would do so at his own risk. His subsidies and stipends would be withheld from him. His house and other property would be confiscated. His testimony as a witness would not be accepted in the courts, and he would be ostracized by other Muslims.

3. On the other hand, every conceivable virtue should be attributed to Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and of course, to Muawiya himself. People should be encouraged to make up "hadith" of the Prophet in praise of these four men and their friends. Whoever invents such hadith, would become a favorite at the royal court, and would receive rich rewards in rank or cash or estates etc.

Concurrently with the founding of his "cottage industry" for manufacturing "hadith" of the Prophet, Muawiya also set up a "brain laundry" for the Muslims. He instituted the practice of anathematizing the memory of Ali and his children from the pulpit in every mosque in his empire so that the Muslim children were born, they grew up, and they died hearing curses upon Ali, and not knowing who he was. Whole generations lived and died in ignorance. Falsehoods were put into circulation by the government on a scale so vast that they became the staple of their lives. Muawiya and his successors kept their "brain laundries" just as busy as their "cottage industry."

Muawiya mobilized every means for waging propaganda war against Ali and the Banu Hashim. The momentum of the blitz he launched against them, has lasted down to our own times. He waged his war from the mosques. The prayer-leaders in them were paid to put weird and fantastic interpretations upon the verses of Qur'an in an attempt to show Ali at a disadvantage. They tried to convince the rank-and-file Muslims that it would be in their interest "in both worlds" if they supported Muawiya against Ali and the Banu Hashim.

Michael C. Hudson

Incumbents have the advantage of the media and educational arms of the state, and they control through subsidies the religious establishment itself. (Islam and Development, p. 16, 1980)

It must now be clear to the reader that the history of Islam was written under the direction of the party which held all the instruments of power in its hands. It must also be obvious to him that much of the historical material was "laundered" at the "brain laundries" established by Muawiya before it got into his hands. Muawiya was a most consummate master of the art of propaganda.

Sir John Glubb

The full effects of propaganda have not yet become plain, yet it is already obvious that whole nations can be indoctrinated with wrong opinions and evil moral standards. Few, if any, minds are strong enough to resist the ideas constantly projected at them. (The Course of Empire - The Arabs and Their Successors, 1965)

If any hadith of the Prophet of Islam was complimentary to Ali, its narration was placed under proscription by Muawiya. This proscription was not lifted when he died in 680. It was not lifted even when his dynasty, the Umayyads, perished in 750, and it was not lifted even through the long centuries of the caliphate of the Abbasis.

The Abbasis exterminated the Umayyads but they shared with them their animosity to Ali and to the children of Muhammad. In this matter, the aims and interests of the governments of Saqifa, the Umayyads, and the Abbasis converged; there was ideological compatibility among them all.

The Umayyads and the Abbasis did their utmost to suppress the facts of history. Many of their khalifas had forbidden their subjects to say or to write anything about Ali except falsehoods. Truth was under a siege and falsehood was rampant in their dominions. And yet, Truth asserted itself.

Truth has (now) arrived, and falsehood perished: For falsehood is (by its nature) bound to perish. (Qur'an. Chapter 17; verse 81)

True statements were volunteered by sources which, in most cases, were inimical to Ali. Even his most rabid enemies like the Umayyads and the Kharjis, conceded the sublimity of his character. As noted before, M. Shibli, the Indian historian, pointed out that the Shia Muslims did not

write any history. Whatever history we have, has, therefore, come down to us from the non-Shia or the anti-Shia sources. It has come down to us from the archives of the governments of Saqifa, the Umayyads and the Abbasis. The story of the glorious deeds of Ali ibn Abi Talib, like the radiance of Truth itself, has filtered out of those archives.

But the modern historians are not threatened by any government for writing factual history nor are they being seduced by promises of rich rewards for writing false history. They should, therefore, curb the temptation to stifle or to distort truth. If they yield even now to this temptation, as many of their forerunners did in the past, then it can mean only that they give their loyalty, not to principles but to persons; not to truth but to the organizations and the governments; and not to their integrity but to their emotional commitments.

Loyalty is a noble quality as long as it is not blind, and does not exclude the higher loyalty to truth and to decency.

If the loyalty of the modern historians is not blind, and if it does not exclude the higher loyalty to truth and to decency, then they should scrape away the excrescences and barnacles of history, and they should also resist the temptation to invoke the "Meyers' Law" in their works. The "Meyers' Law" stipulates that:

"If the facts do not fit the theory, discard the facts."

A historian will inevitably run into truths which may be unpleasant to him but he must not suppress them. He must state all the facts as he uncovers them if he wishes to vindicate truth.

But the historian, if he is a Muslim, has no choice in this matter. He is not free to write "inspired" or "synthetic" history. All he can do, if he is writing history, is to cling tenaciously to truth. If he writes false "history" for any reason, he will only merit the displeasure of God. Here, as elsewhere, al-Qur'an al-Majid, the Book of God, is explicit, emphatic, and unequivocal in its judgment which reads as follows:

And cover not truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth when ye know (what it is). (Qur'an. Chapter 2; verse 42)

Those who conceal the clear (signs) We have sent down, and the guidance, after We have made it clear for the people in the Book – on them shall be God's curse, and the curse of those entitled to curse. (Qur'an. Chapter 2; verse 159)

If the Muslim historians make these two verses of Qur'an their "guiding stars," they will be protected from error, and they will also be protected from becoming either the agents or the victims of propaganda, consciously or unconsciously.

In trying to smirch the name of Ali ibn Abi Talib; in trying to play down his services to Islam; and in desperately trying to conceal his glorious deeds, behind a screen of propaganda, from the eyes of posterity, his enemies were casting dust into the bright face of the sun. They raised clouds of dust in the form of most virulent and sustained propaganda against him, and yet, the sun only shone brighter and brighter.

And God blots out vanity, and proves the truth by His words. (Qur'an. Chapter 42; verse 24)

God blessed Ali's name to all eternity. His name is the symbol of love of God, and the symbol of Justice and Truth. His name will endure as long as Love of God, and Justice and Truth, will endure in this world.

"Wisdom is the lost property of the Believer,

let him claim it wherever he finds it"

Imam Ali (as)